

**University of KwaZulu-Natal**

**Developing conflict management strategies for optimal  
organisational efficiency in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd.**

**By**

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## **SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION**

As the candidate's Supervisor, I agree to the submission of this thesis.

Signed: ..... Date.....

Dr A. Kader

## DECLARATION

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## **DEDICATION**

I, therefore, dedicate this dissertation to the following people:

- The Lord Jesus Christ for His strength in seeing me through in my academic journey.
- My soulmate (Mrs Omolara J.Oluwatuyi-Akpan) for the peaceful environment she created for the study to flourish.
- My three beautiful girls: Mary, Precious and Victoria.

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## **Abstract**

The study investigates ways in which the managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency at Automouldam (Pty) Ltd. Based on the objectives of the study, three research questions were developed for the study, namely: what are the potential conflict areas in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd? What are the effects of organisational conflict in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd? What are the ways in which managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in the company?

A qualitative research approach was adopted for the study. In line with the qualitative approach employed, an interpretive paradigm was used to make sense of ways in which managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in the company. Out of the target population of 126 staff, the researcher purposively selected ten participants for the study. Two research instruments were employed to generate data for the study. In line with the qualitative approach adopted, the researcher transcribed the data and thereafter it was subjected to open coding. The emerging themes were subjected to thematic analysis.

The following key findings discovered were that the potential causes of conflict in Automouldam were the breach of contractual agreements, inadequate or poor communication between employer and employees, goal differences among workers, lack of cooperation among workers, increment of salary and other incentives, and inadequate resources. Furthermore, low productivity, time wastage, absenteeism, disharmony, psychological trauma/stress, and low income to the company were identified as the effects of conflict in the company. Additionally, ways in which managers develop conflict management strategies for the optimisation of organisational efficiency in the company were the establishing a good working relationship with workers, provision of adequate channels of communication, provision of a good working environment, provision of incentives, negotiation with workers on issues bothering them and fulfilment of agreements reached with workers.

Based on the findings reached recommendations were suggested that both the managers and the workers should be able to respect and abide by the terms and conditions of the agreement they entered into. When any of the parties involved in the agreement breach the agreement they voluntarily entered into, mistrust and disharmony set in. That the management of the company should regularly increase the salaries on the workers, this will ultimately motivate

the workers to put in their best for the progress of the company. Additionally, the management of the company should provide incentives for the workers such as the introduction of bursaries for the workers' children, which will act as a catalyst in motivating workers to put in their best for the company.

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## **Chapter one**

### **The journey begins**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

This study investigates developing conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd. The researcher begins by looking at the background to the study, statement of the problem, focus of the study, rationale of the study and objectives of the study. Additionally, the key research questions, organisation of the thesis, and the definition of terms are explained.

#### **1.2 Background to the study**

No company or industry in the world has ever experienced a conflict free environment and there will never be. However, tensions, anarchy, aggressions, frustrations, racial discriminations, negative attitudes and oppression are always part of an integral organisation which workers live and work with. According to Kossek, Pichler, Bodner and Hammer (2011), conflict in the workplace is an inseparable part of a worker's life. There are different opinions expressed regarding conflict in the workplace. While scholars such as De Dreu and Gelfand (2008) perceive conflict in the workplace as a negative situation that should be avoided, a researcher like Sindhu (2010) is of the view that conflict is a phenomenon that necessitates effective and efficient management. Drawing from these opposite positions, it may not be out of context to say that conflict in the workplace may be seen as an avenue for attitudinal change of the management and workers alike. In an organisation, conflict is in every decision that the manager makes. Sindhu (2010) argues that adjusting effectively and efficiently to potential conflicts is one of the most essential characteristics of a manager. Since conflict in an organisation is inevitable, it is necessary for directors or managers to recognise the causes of conflict, and more importantly view it from both constructive and destructive perspectives, and hence, learn ways to manage and adopt a conflict management approach in a practical way.

### **1.3 Statement of the problem**

Automouldam (Pty) Ltd is a privately owned company with an asset base of more than R2.6 billion. Since its establishment, the company has been contributing substantially to the economy of the country by providing gainful employment to South Africans and other non-South Africans. However, from the director's position and this researcher's observation, the company has recently been experiencing some degree of conflict with the staff. The incessant conflicts in the organisation in recent times have resulted in low morale and productivity among workers. Apart from the low morale and productivity experienced by the workers, two management personnel were on an indefinite suspension by the management of the company because of the crises in the company. In a similar development, the company's official monthly reports indicate that the total production outputs in the last 18 months have dropped astronomically. It was stated in the report that the drop in the production outputs was caused by incessant conflict in the company. It was also established in the report that the drop in outputs negatively and adversely affected the company's overall turnover. In light of the above, the study sets out to investigate ways in which the managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in the company.

### **1.4 Focus of the study**

Conflict is inevitable among human beings. In fact, it is a natural outcome of human interaction that begins when two or more social entities (that is, individuals, groups, organisations and even nations) come into contact with one another in attaining their objectives. In Automouldam (Pty) Ltd., there has been existence of conflict between employees and the employer, therefore, the focus of this study is to investigate ways in which the managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in the company.

### **1.5 Rationale/motivation of the study**

The rationale for this study is two-fold, namely: professional and academic. For the purposes of clarity and orderliness, the researcher began by looking from the perspective of professional motivation and this was subsequently followed by academic motivation.

In the area of professional motivation, the researcher arrived in South Africa from Nigeria in 2010. In order to stabilise financially, the researcher sought and got employment with Automouldam (Pty) Ltd as one of the staff. From the inception of the researcher's employment, the company had made profits annually. Moreover, the researcher observed a relative industrial stability in the company during the initial stage of his employment. Between the 2014 and 2015 financial years, the company experienced industrial conflicts, and it is pertinent to state that the conflicts in the company negatively affected workers' morale. This low morale of workers resulted in low turnover experienced by the company in recent times. It is in light of the above that the researcher's curiosity was sparked to investigate ways in which the managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in the company.

In the context of academics, the researcher has been able to review literature dealing with conflict and conflict management strategies. However, it has been observed by the researcher that a lot of research has been done in the field nationally and internationally. From the national perspective, Mangaliso (2001) worked on 'Building competitive advantage from ubuntu: Management lessons from South Africa,' Prime (1999) researched on 'Cross-cultural management in South Africa: Problems, obstacles and agenda for companies.' Additionally, on the international scene, Aquino (2000) researched on 'the structural and individual determinants of workplace victimisation: The effects of hierarchical status and conflict management style,' Sindhu (2010) conducted a study on 'Conflict Management in the Workplace', Trudel and Reio (2011) worked on 'Managing workplace incivility: The role of conflict management styles-antecedent or antidote?' among others. Despite the volume of works done on conflict, it was established that no research has been conducted on the topic under investigation. Furthermore, most of the studies conducted on conflict and conflict management employed a quantitative approach with a very few employing a qualitative approach. This existing gap encouraged the researcher to embark on this study. This led the researcher to the issue of the objectives of the study. This is explained below.

## **1.6 Objectives of the study**

This study was guided by the following objectives:

- a) To examine the potential conflict in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd.
- b) To examine the effects of organisational conflict in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd.



- c) To determine the ways in which managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in the company.

## **1.7 Key research questions**

In line with the objectives, the following research questions were developed to guide the study.

- What are the potential conflict areas in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd?
- What are the effects of organisational conflict in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd?
- What are the ways in which managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in the company?

## **1.8 Significance of the study**

In every research study there are potential beneficiaries, however, this study is not an exception. Therefore, the study is of immense significance to the director, managers and workers of Automouldam (Pty) Ltd, by highlighting potential areas of conflict and also identifying strategies in which these conflicts can be resolved.

Additionally, the recommendations from the study are of great benefit to other companies and industries in South Africa and other countries of the world in creating fertile grounds for amicable relationships between the employer and employees, hence boosting staff morale and team spirit in the company.

From the scholarly perspective, this study aside from contributing to an existing body of knowledge in the field of business and leadership, will also act as a reference material for other researchers and scholars in the business education and conference papers.

## **1.9 Organisational structure of the thesis**

This is the organisational of structure of the dissertation.

### **1.9.1 Chapter one: Introduction**

Chapter one of the dissertation focuses on the background to the study, the statement of the problem and the focus of the study. In addition, the chapter provides insight into the

objectives of the research, key research questions, significance of the study and organisational structure of the thesis as well as operational definition of concepts.

### **1.9.2 Chapter two: Review of related literature and theoretical framework**

Chapter two of this dissertation looks at the review of related literature and theoretical framework. For clarity purposes, the literature bordered on the conceptualisation of conflict, types of conflict, conflict process, causes of conflict in organisations, orientations to conflict: constructive or destructive, conflict resolution skills/techniques, among others. Additionally, the theoretical framework adopted for the study is the general system theory.

### **1.9.3 Chapter three: Research methodology and design**

Chapter three of the dissertation discussed the research methodology and design. In this chapter, qualitative, interpretive paradigm and case study approaches were adopted as the research methodology and design. The methods adopted for the conduct of the study involved purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews, transcription, open coding and thematic analysis, which will be used to make sense of ways in which managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency at Automouldam (Pty) Ltd. In addition, the chapter will explain the ethical issues employed in the study as well as describe challenges experienced while conducting fieldwork.

### **1.9.4 Chapter four: Data presentation and discussion**

In chapter four, data collected from the field was presented and discussed. However, effort was made to draw from the literature, conceptual and theoretical frameworks to either support or reject the findings of the study.

### **1.9.5 Chapter five: Summary, recommendations and conclusion**

This chapter look at the overall structure of the dissertation, in other words, the summary of the whole thesis beginning from chapter one to five. In addition, the key findings from the study were once again presented. Furthermore, based on the findings reached, areas of future

research were highlighted. Recommendations and possible suggestions for the company and other companies were also provided.

## **1.10 Definition of concepts**

In this dissertation, there are certain concepts used and these are explained below.

### **1.10.1 Conflict**

Conflict is generally viewed as relational disputes between two or more individuals. In the context of this study, conflict involves relational disputes between the management of the company and the workers. The conflict usually occurs as a result of disagreements of goals, facts or expectations.

### **1.10.2 Management strategies**

In this study, management strategies are the future-oriented conception in which the relationship between the company and the environment (pattern for adapting to the environment) is described and it forms the guiding principles for the workers in the company for decision-making.

### **1.10.3 Organisational efficiency**

In this study, organisational efficiency refers to an organisation's level of success in utilising the least possible inputs in order to produce and maximise the greatest possible outputs. For an organisation to thrive at achieving its goals, it must create the right plans and environment, acquire the resources necessary to implement its plans and use its resources in the implementation of its plans. Efficient organisations implement plans using the smallest possible expenditure of resources to generate high margins of profit.

## **Chapter two**

### **Review of the literature and theoretical framework**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, the researcher orientated the audience on the background to the study, focus of the study, objectives of the study, key research questions and the organisational structure of the dissertation. However, this chapter deals with the review of related literature. In this chapter, effort will be geared towards explaining the conceptualisation of conflict, types of conflict, orientation to conflict, causes of conflict in organisations, effects of conflict in organisations, managing conflict strategies and managing conflict through communication. In addition, the researcher will focus on negotiation in conflict and the general system theory as a theoretical framework for the study.

#### **2.2 Conceptualisation of conflict**

The concept 'conflict' is derived from the Latin word *confligere*, which invariably means to strike together (Rahim, 2011). However, this concept has no single meaning. Rather, it could be argued that various scholars in different disciplines who are interested in studying conflict cause most of the confusion created by having these multidimensional definitions. A glance at the conflict literature shows a conceptual sympathy for, but very little consensual endorsement of, any generally accepted conceptualisation of conflict (Rahim, 2011). There are tremendous variations in the conceptualisation of conflict. This involves a wide range of conceptualisation for specific interests and a variety of general meanings that attempt to be all inclusive.

Most of the major theorists of conflict come from backgrounds of philosophy, sociology and political science. Only a few of these theorists come from other disciplines such as biology and management. For the purpose of this study, it will be beneficial to look at the conceptualisation of conflict from the holistic point of view in order to come up with a working definition for this study. Scholars such as Thomas, Bliese and Jex (2005) view conflict as a disagreement in opinions between people or groups, due to personal differences

in attitudes, beliefs, values or needs. Ocasio (2011) considers conflict as the breakdown in the standard mechanism of decision making, so that an individual or group experiences difficulty in the selection of an alternative. Koslowsky, Baharav and Schwarzwald (2011) define conflict as an interactive state in which behaviour or goals of one actor are to some degree incompatible with the behaviour or goals of some other actor or actors. In a similar circumstance, Smith (2010) conceptualises conflict as a situation in which the conditions, practices, or goals for the different participants are inherently incompatible. Notwithstanding the view held by Ku and Smith (2010) who see conflict as a behaviour that occurs when two or more parties are in opposition or in a battle as a result of a perceived relative deprivation from the activities of or interacting with another person or group. Looking at the different definitions given above it could be argued that there are commonalities. All the scholars see conflict from the perspective of incompatibility, opposition in goals, activities or interaction among the social entities. In light of the above, the researcher conceptualises conflict as an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, discord, disagreement or dissonance between or among social entities such as persons, groups or organisations.

### **2.3 Views on conflict**

Researchers such as Abiodun (2014) argue that there are different perceptions regarding conflict. From all indications, conflict is a reality in every individual's life and should be seen as a natural process that occurs on a daily basis (Rahim, 2011). Robins et al. (2013) contain that as an organisation or group performs its assigned responsibilities, conflict inevitably arises. Conflict is seen as natural due to life's uncertainty. Conflict is good and necessary because it can stimulate innovative thinking when it is managed in the proper way (Abiodun, 2014).

According to Rahim (2011), individuals or organisations find it comfortable to live with unresolved misunderstanding rather than facing the fact that fundamental differences do exist, and demand recognition and appropriate management. An individual cannot avoid conflicts in the family, in the workplace or even when watching football on the television. According to Rahim (2011), there are three schools of thought concerning conflict and these are traditional, human relations and interactionist views.

### **2.3.1 Traditional view**

From the traditionalist point of view, conflict can be avoided as it reflects malefaction within the group (Abiodun, 2014). Conflict is viewed negatively and is associated with violence and destruction. Conflict happens because of poor communication and lack of trust between or among people in the organisation. From the traditionalist perspective, conflict can be eliminated or resolved only at the high level of management. According to Ringstad (2005), the traditional school of thought believes that there is a need to pay attention to the causes of conflict and correct it in order to improve group and organisation performance. It is the view of the followers of the traditional school of thought that most conflicts in organisations have negative connotations, invoke negative feelings and often resulted in destruction (Roelfs, 2012). Goetsch and Davis (2014) opine that whether the effect of conflict is good or bad depends solely on the strategies adopted to deal with it.

### **2.3.2 Human relations view**

From the human relations point of view, conflict is a natural occurrence in all organisations. The human relations school accepts conflict as natural. According to Ringstad (2005), the human relations school of thought believes that conflict may benefit an organisation's performance. In this school of thought, conflicts occur from time to time and it is not wise to put too much effort into avoiding or preventing it (Ringstad, 2005). Rather, it is the belief of this school of thought that concentrating on large or critical conflicts in the organisation allows people to resolve the conflict in a better and more effective way (Leung, Brew, Zhang & Zhang, 2010). Robins, Bates and Pattison (2011) argue that in the human relations view, conflict is seen as a natural and inevitable outcome of people working together in groups and teams, therefore, it should not necessarily be viewed negatively, rather positively as a potential force in contributing to the performance of individuals.

### **2.3.3 Interactionist view**

From the interactionist's view, conflict is not only a positive force, instead it is also necessary for an individual to perform efficiently and effectively. Robins, Bates and Pattison (2011) contain that resolving conflicts means challenging normal processes and procedures in an effort to improve workers' productivity or introduce innovative systems. In this school of

thought, conflict is seen as necessary to perform effectively, but not all conflicts are good for the organisation. The proponents of this view identified different forms of conflict in the organisation to include:

- a) task conflict, which relates to the content and goals of the organisation;
- b) relationship conflict, which deals with the interpersonal relationships; and
- c) process conflict, which focuses on how the tasks in the organisation get done (Robins, Bates & Pattison, 2011).

According to Robins, Bates and Pattison (2011), the interactionists look at conflict in a completely different way to the traditionalists and those with a human relations view. From the interactionist's perspective, conflict can be identified as either dysfunctional or functional (Robins, Bates & Pattison, 2011). Conflict is a part of people's lives and a natural phenomenon in all organisations. Ernst Kossek and Ozeki (1998) opine that a low level of conflict will not be harmful for daily operations but will assist in creating a smooth functioning through better understanding of existing issues. Conflict at the desired level can inspire creativity when handling issues and resolving conflict. Therefore, Leung, Brew, Zhang and Zhang (2010) argue that conflict can be positive in work environments, but whenever a critical or major conflict occurs, it should be resolved as the undesired level of conflict can be harmful and dysfunctional for the organisation.

## **2.3 Types of conflict**

Scholars such as Nastase (2009), Rahim (2011) and Shanker (2013) argue that there are four types of conflict. These include interpersonal, intragroup, intergroup and inter-organisational conflicts. Each of these conflicts is explained below.

### **2.3.1 Interpersonal conflict**

As the name implies, this type of conflict occurs when an individual or a group of people interferes with another person's efforts at achieving a goal. According to Liou (2008), interpersonal conflict could be personal dislikes or personality differences. Researchers such as Bankovskaya (2012) argue that people respond in different ways to dispute; this leads to interpersonal conflict. Wilmot and Hocker (2001) say that though interpersonal conflict is often unpleasant and threatening, it can also jeopardise the achievement of the organisational

goal or relationships. Interpersonal conflict raises a significant issue, clarifies interests and goals, reduces tension, produces new and creative ideas, and creates constructive change in the organisation (Deutsch & Coleman, 2000). However, Bankovskaya (2012) contains that a better understanding of the genesis and dynamics of interpersonal conflict can lead an individual to work through conflict constructively.

### **2.3.2 Intragroup conflict**

According to Jehn and Bendersky (2003), intragroup conflict is a process that emerges when a group of individuals perceives differences and incompatibilities between them and another individual about interests and resources, beliefs, values, or practices that matter to them within a group. From all indications, this type of conflict involves more than one person within a group (Nastase, 2009). Korsgaard, Jeong, Mahony and Pitariu (2008) assert that the degree of intragroup conflict in an organisation is high when there are some elements of lack of coordination between individual teams. Intragroup conflict within an organisation is a healthy sign, because it assists each team to work together and exhibit better performance when compared with that of other teams (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003). Jehn and Mannix (2001) identified two main types of intragroup conflict, namely task conflict and relationship conflict.

### **2.3.3 Task conflict**

According to Medina, Munduate, Dorado, Martínez and Guerra (2005), task conflict happens when two parties are unable to move forward on a task due to differing needs, behaviours or attitudes. This can be conflict over organisational policies and procedures, distribution of resources, or the method or means of completing a task (Jehn, 1995). The importance of task conflict is that various individuals feel more satisfied within a group, due to the task conflict. This is because they can present their views and opinions within a group and this can lead to better self-esteem, recognition and job satisfaction (Medina, Munduate, Dorado, Martínez & Guerra, 2005). However, Jehn and Mannix (2001) contain that task conflict is easily prone to becoming a relationship conflict; hence it has to be eschewed.



### **2.3.4 Relationship conflict**

Relationship conflict dwells on interpersonal relationships and hostilities among individuals in an organisation (Jehn & Mannix, 2001). According to Bono, Boles, Judge and Lauver (2002), because of its volatile and counter-productive nature, relationship conflict is viewed from a destructive and harmful perspective. Jehn and Mannix (2001) argue that relationship conflict has a negative effect on the individuals working in a group or organisation. In addition, De Dreu and Van Vianen (2001) opine that relationship conflict leads to delayed projects and poor outcomes. A study conducted by Powers, Pietromonaco, Gunlicks and Sayer (2006) indicates that managers held that most of their time is wasted in settling the relationship conflicts among their employees, co-workers and staff members in the organisation. In addition, in one of their studies, Mohammed and Angell (2004) report that relationship conflicts consume approximately 18% of the managers' total time.

### **2.4 Intergroup conflict**

As the name implies, intergroup conflict is the conflict that occurs between different groups, teams and departments in an organisation (Mohammed & Angell, 2004). A battle between accounting and operations workers or between frontline workers and online customer service agents is a good example of intergroup conflict. However, such a conflict arises from the differences in status and contradicting goals of the groups (Mohammed & Angell, 2004). Intergroup conflict often occurs due to miscommunication or no communication. This, invariably, affects an organisation's ability to function effectively. Here, the manager may try to resolve the problem through problem-solving strategies or following an internal dispute resolution process.

### **2.5 Inter-organisational conflict**

According to Kehinde (2011), inter-organisational conflict is a conflict that occurs between two or more different organisations. Additionally, inter-organisational conflict deals with the industrial environment and national or organisational cultural elements that convey in this form a unique pattern when compared with other conflict situations. Furthermore, inter-organisational conflict has the distinction of occurrence in a dynamic business environment. When conflict occurs between two or more organisations, the existence of the 'environmental

context' of ever-changing organisational relationships affects its development (Budhwar & Pathak, 1999). Here, the environmental context connotes those forces in the environment that are beyond organisations' control. Lumineau, Eckerd and Handley (2015) argue that there are three types of inter-organisational conflict, namely substantive conflict, emotional conflict and cultural conflict.

### **2.5.1 Substantive conflict**

Lumineau, Eckerd and Handley (2015) say that substantive conflict occurs in an organisation when a basic disagreement arises between the two organisations at a fundamental level. A disagreement with one manager over a plan of action to be followed such as the marketing strategy for a new product is a good example of substantive conflict. When people from different backgrounds are brought together to work on a daily basis, it is obvious that there will be different viewpoints on a variety of substantive workplace issues.

### **2.5.2 Emotional conflict**

According to Lumineau, Eckerd and Handley (2015), emotional conflict is referred to as an interpersonal difficulty that arises over feelings of anger, mistrust, dislike, fear and resentment. However, this type of conflict is commonly referred to as a 'clash of personalities' (Lumineau, 2014). Emotional conflict can drain the energies of workers and distract them from significant work priorities.

### **2.5.3 Cultural conflict**

Cultural conflict occurs when people from diverse cultural backgrounds are employed in the organisation with different cultural needs and aspirations. Some workers may have specific cultural needs or requirements that should be taken into account (Roche, Teague & Colvin, 2014). For instance, a worker from a particular religious or cultural background is entitled to wear his/her religious dress at work, except if it creates a safety hazard. However, if one religious dress covers his/her face, the worker may be asked to show his/her face for reasonable identification. This may cause conflict in the organisation.

## **2.6 Orientations to conflict: Constructive or destructive**

During the past decades, most managers of organisations were of the view that conflict was only on the negative side (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003). In recent times, Jehn and Bendersky (2003) maintain that two different orientations to conflict have evolved, namely constructive and dysfunctional.

From the perspective of the constructive form of conflict, this supports the goals of the organisation and improves the productivity of the organisation. Constructive conflict encourages greater work effort and assists in task performance. One of the merits of constructive conflict is that it gives workers a chance to identify the problems and see the opportunities (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003). Furthermore, it can inspire new ideas, learning, and growth among workers in the organisation. When workers engage in constructive conflict, they can learn more about themselves and others. Additionally, it assists in improving a relationship among workers, because when two sides work on resolving a disagreement together, they feel that they have mutually accomplished their missions (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003).

Augsburger (1992, p.25) introduced four assumptions concerning constructive conflict in the organisation to say thus:

- a) Conflict is a normal, useful process;
- b) All issues are subject to change through negotiation;
- c) Direct confrontation and conciliation are valued; and
- d) Conflict is a necessary renegotiation of an implied contract - a redistribution of opportunity, release of tension and renewal of relationships.

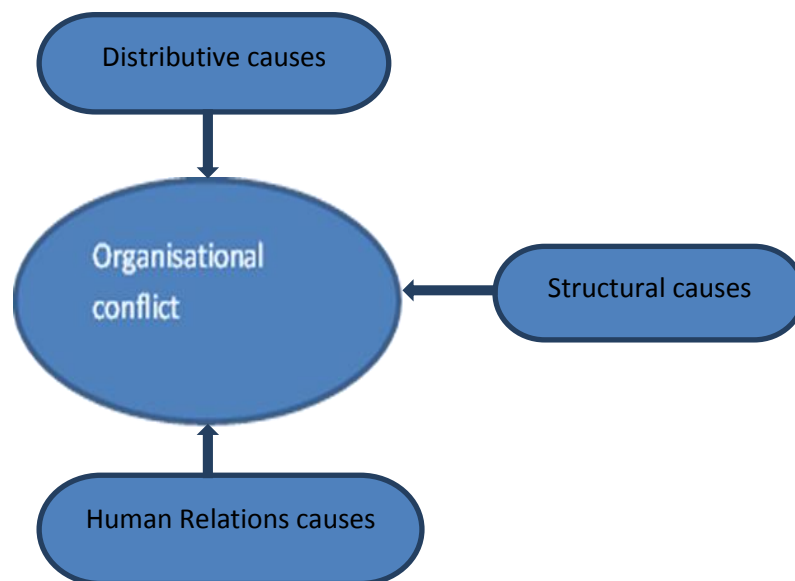
On first assumption, it therefore means that despite the fact that conflict is a complicated process, it can strengthen relationships in the organisation. When the conflict is effectively managed correctly, it will lead to stronger, healthier and more satisfying relationships in the organisation. Concerning the second, third and fourth assumptions, the main idea is to identify conflict as quickly as possible and address it for the betterment of the organisation (Martin & Nakayama, 2007).

In the context of destructive conflict, Hoel and Cooper (2000) say that this form of conflict obviously hinders organisational performance and efficiency and that it leads to low productivity. For instance, competing individual interests overriding the business's overall interests characterise conflict orientation. Workers withhold certain information from one another. Individuals sabotage others' work, either intentionally or through subtle, conflict-motivated disinterest in teamwork. According to Hoel and Cooper (2000), the differences between these two types of conflict are not in their sources but in the manner in which each of them is expressed. However, in constructive conflict each group resists attacking the other. Rather, both sides take part in thoughtful discussion for the good of the organisation. In sharp contrast, Whetten and Cameron (2012) argue that in destructive conflict both groups are involved in confrontation that does not lead to any beneficial solution in the organisation.

## **2.7 Causes of organisational conflict**

According to Kemp (1992, p. 26), "all behaviour has consequences of some sort for the individual. Looking at conflict, one finds that certain events trigger conflict, which leads the parties involved to react and behave in certain ways. These reactions either resolve or escalate the conflict. Therefore, the escalation or de-escalation of the conflict is a consequence of the reactions of the people involved." In any organisation, there are many causes of conflict. Tustin and Geldenhuys (2003), Henry (2009), Jones and George (2016) maintain that there are three major categories of organisational conflict, namely distributive, structural and human relations causes. This is graphically shown below.

Fig. 2.1: Sources of conflict in an organisation



**Source:** Adapted from Jones and George, 2016.

### 2.7.1 Distributive causes

Distributive causes underlie conflict that arises in the formulation or operation of the economic or substantive contract or agreement (Tustin & Geldenhuys, 2003). The distributive causes are based on the problem of the allocation or distribution of rewards for the performance of tasks in the organisation. Henry (2009) asserts that the initial stimulus for the conflict would not necessarily emanate from within the organisation, rather from the market environment which is beyond the organisation's boundaries. Robbins, Judge, Millett and Boyle (2013) argue that any problem or failure to solve a problem may be ascribed to inadequate communication between the management, employees and/or trade unions. From all indications, this is one of the popular myths of labour relations (Jensen, 1998). Furthermore, it would be out of context to overrate the significance of communication both as the cause of conflict and as the means to resolve it (Salamon, 1998). Tidström (2009) contains that the source of organisational conflict lies most of the time in differences of objectives and interests, and communication between different levels of an organisation provides only a means to identify differences, to develop a better understanding and to seek accommodation within a mutually acceptable solution. A Philipian study conducted in the

banking organisation by Tsevendorj (2008) rated communication failure, perception, values and culture problems as moderately serious sources of conflict.

### **2.7.2 Structural causes**

Krasner (2010) states that structural causes are the basis of the sort of problems that emerge from the interactions brought about by the formal structure of the organisation, and are usually the result of a failure to structure the organisation properly. This area of conflict is not always as manifest as the issues in distributive conflict. Therefore, for this reason it does not get as much attention in the organisation. Using a Nigerian service as a case study, Hotepo, Asokere, Abdul-Azeez and Ajemunigbohun (2010) argue that lack of resources, different expectations, competition, lack of cooperation, interdependence and communication problems are the major causes of organisational conflict.

In another development, Jones and George (2016) compartmentalise structural causes of conflict into seven groups, namely: specialisation, common resources, goal differences, interdependence, authority relationships, roles and expectations and jurisdictional ambiguities.

#### **2.7.2.1 Specialisation**

Here, workers in the organisation tend to become specialists in a particular job or get a general knowledge of many jobs. When many workers in the organisation are specialists, this can lead to conflicts because they have little knowledge of each other's job responsibilities (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014). A good example of causes of specialisation conflict is a receptionist at a camera repair store may say that a camera can be repaired in three hours, even though the repair will take five days. However, since the receptionist does not know much about the technician's work he/she should not give an unrealistic deadline of when the camera will be ready for use. This situation may lead to conflict between the technician and receptionist.

#### **2.7.2.2 Common resources**

In any organisation, there are resources to work with. However, in a situation where the resources are scarce in the organisation, there is a possibility that the scarcity of these resources can lead to a conflict situation (Rahim, 2011). Resource scarcity in the organisation leads to a conflict because each worker that needs the same resources necessarily undermines other workers who chase their own goals. Here, scarce resources can be money, supplies, information, among others.

#### **2.7.2.3 Goal differences**

On so many occasions, Rahim (2011) reports that the possibility of conflict increases considerably when some sections in the organisation have different or incompatible goals. For instance, the goal of a production manager in a car manufacturing company is to produce as many cars as possible. However, when the marketing manager is unable to meet the sales target in the company, it can lead to conflict between the two managers.

#### **2.7.2.4 Interdependence**

According to Omisore and Abiodun (2014), the possibility of conflict usually has a tendency to increase with the level of task interdependence. When a worker has to depend on another to complete his/her task, it becomes easier to blame a co-worker when something goes wrong (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014). As a rule, interdependence exists in the company when team members must take an interest in the process of work and receive benefits which depend on the performance of other workers.

#### **2.7.2.5 Authority relationships**

In many organisations, there is an underlying tension between managers and junior workers because most workers do not like being told what they have to do. Moreover, most managers like to exercise their authority in the workplace. This does not go down well with their subordinates hence there may be tension which later ends in conflict. This assertion is supported by Omisore and Abiodun (2014) who contain that strict managers often have conflicts with their employees.

### **2.7.2.6 Roles and expectations**

A role is a behaviour that is expected from workers in an organisation (Rahim, 2011). Every worker has one or more roles to play in an organisation. These roles consist of such elements as job title, description of duties and agreement between the workers and the management of the organisation. In the company, when a manager set out the roles for junior workers to perform and they fail or don't perform to the expectation of the manager, this may lead to conflict (Whetten & Cameron, 2012a).

### **2.7.2.7 Jurisdictional ambiguities**

According to Omisore and Abiodun (2014), when the lines of responsibility in an organisation are undefined then jurisdictional ambiguities appear. Workers have a tendency to pass unwanted responsibilities on to another worker when responsibilities are not clearly defined (Rahim, 2011). Ambiguous goals, jurisdictions and performance criteria often lead to organisational conflict. Under such ambiguity, the formal and informal rules that govern interaction are completely broken down (Zapf, 1999).

### **2.7.3 Human relations causes**

The context of human relations causes underlies the sort of problems that emerge from the informal, interpersonal level of interaction. Robbins (1998) argues that human relation causes is an important area of conflict because all conflict is manifested at the human relations level. Luthans (2010) contains that the sources of interpersonal conflict are personal differences, information deficiency, role incompatibility and environmental stress. Furthermore, another important source of human relations conflict is the type of conflict in which the worker experiences within him/ herself (Luthans, 2010). In his study, Obasan (2011) identified unacceptable terms of employment, poor human relations between management and workers, non-consultation with employees before making key decisions affecting them and anti-union posture of management as multiple causal causes of organisational conflict.



## **2.8. Effects of conflict in the organisation**

Conflicts may have negative or positive effects in the organisation, depending on the atmosphere created by the manager as she/he administers and regulates the conflict situation (McDowell et al., 2007). The effects of conflict in the organisation are often wide reaching and time consuming. An effective and efficient manager should be able to differentiate between conflict that will boost productivity and build stronger teamwork in the organisation and conflict that will bring low output and hinder organisational inefficiency.

One of the negative effects of conflict in the organisation is that it can distract workers from their primary purposes, hence leaving them with less time and resources for other activities (Luthans, 2010). A study conducted by Floyd and Lane (2000) indicates that 75% of the respondents agreed that conflict in the organisation resulted in low productivity. In a similar vein, Lovelace, Shapiro and Weingart (2009) argue that the poor outputs experienced in automobile industries in Poland between 1991 and 2003 were as result of the conflict in the sector. However, when organisational conflict involves the use of 'heavy contentious tactics,' it can cause the organisation as well as workers involved in the conflict to divert time and resources away. Conflict has the potential to reduce cooperation among the team and foster a lack of receptiveness to the ideas of other groups (Jehn, Northcraft & Neale, 1999).

In a similar development, conflict can have both short-term and long-term effects on the physical and psychological health of the workers. In worst-case scenarios, the psychological consequences of conflict can include deep trauma and diminished coping mechanisms (Mowday, Porter & Steers, 2013). Additionally, conflict can lead to collective traumas, however, this collective trauma may eventually result in chosen trauma and can be transmitted to future generations in the form of resentment against one's ancestors' enemies (Mowday, Porter & Steers, 2013). According to Conti, Angelis, Cooper, Faragher and Gill (2006), chosen trauma may give rise to group identity and this keeps the flame of conflict burning in an organisation.

Still on the negatives of conflict, research conducted by Jensen-Campbell Lauri and Graziano (2005) has shown that conflict in an organisation is a major stressor and a leading contributor to absenteeism and late coming. Moreover, researchers such as Fox, Spector and Miles (2001) have noted that conflict is an acute stressor that often results in negative emotions and feelings of frustration in the company. Omisore and Abiodun (2014) say that the effect of

conflict may result in the physiological response in the worker's body. This happens when more and more adrenalin is shot into the blood which increases the heart beat and blood pressure while more hydrochloric acid is secreted into the stomach, leading to illness such as peptic ulcers, respiratory problems like asthma, headaches, coronary problems and hypertension (Haar, 2004). Researchers such as De Dreu and Weingart (2003) and Mooney et al. (2007) do caution that conflict may lead to affective conflict because people's comments can be taken out of context and interpreted as personal criticism, or a person becomes suspicious that another person's comment or action is a sign of a veiled agenda. Amason (1996) argues that within top management teams, conflict is likely to arise when one member perceives that he/she is being personally criticised or simply when interpersonal incompatibilities occur. Hambrick (2009) maintains that top management teams are, in essence, a collection of high-powered, high-ranking, influential people who often operate distinctly from each other and therefore are prone to self-centred behaviour and interests.

In the context of positive effects of conflict in the organisation, researchers have highlighted some of the positive effects of conflict situations. Dijkstra, Beersma and Leeuwen (2014) argue that when two individuals who respect each other face a conflict situation, the conflict resolution process may help in clarifying the facts and stimulating a search for mutually acceptable solutions. The scholars went further to say that when two or more groups are in conflict, the performance and cooperation of each group is likely to improve and progress. In a conflict situation, an opponent's spot is evaluated adversely, and group allegiance is strongly reinforced, which leads to increased group effort and cooperation. This assertion is sharply refuted by Jehn, Northcraft and Neale (1999) who argue that conflict has the potential to reduce cooperation among the team and foster a lack of receptiveness to the ideas of other groups.

Another positive effect of conflict in the organisation is formation of group cohesion. Terry, Carey and Callan (2000) contain that cohesion in the company was predicted by high tension and high negative affectivity, among other factors. When tension among workers in the company is present and group members harbour perceptions of unfairness, group cohesion is likely to be high (Terry et al., 2000). Considering the context of relationship conflict, it appears unlikely that this kind of conflict may foster perceptions of group cohesion, unless anger would be quelled effectively. Rusting and Nolen-Hoeksema (1998) agreed that distraction decreased anger in association with rumination, and that using distraction during conflict may lead to better group processes, such as perceptions of group cohesion. In a

similar circumstance, Marks, Mathieu and Zaccaro (2001) suggest that a successful organisation is often characterised to a large extent than less successful organisations by open discussion of conflicting points of issue.

In a similar circumstance, an area that is traditionally related to positive conflict is group decision-making in the organisation. Here, the idea is that dissent and conflict in groups prevent premature consensus (Schulz-Hardt, Jochims & Frey, 2002), rather, it leads to group decisions of higher quality (Brodbeck, Kerschreiter, Mojzisch, Frey & Schulz-Hardt, 2002). In furtherance to the above, De Dreu (2008) argues that when group members share the same sub-optimal preference early on, they are less likely to critically evaluate and debate decision options and reach decisions of lower quality, than when group members have different, opposing preferences. Preference heterogeneity is said to result in a better decision quality, in part due to greater conflict, debate and concomitant critical reflection (Schulz-Hardt, Mojzisch & Vogelgesang, 2007). Although more can still be argued, the above actually clarify that 'positive conflict' has primarily positive consequences in the organisation.

## **2.9 Conflict management strategies**

Prior studies provide limited guidance on how an organisation can manage conflict. However, some scholars such as Shenkar and Zeira (1992) and Weick (1995) encourage organisations to create an informal, flexible and autonomous work environment to reduce conflict. Furthermore, experts like Ashforth and Saks (1999) suggest that increased formalisation is appropriate for managing conflict in the organisation. Thomas and Kilmann (1976) developed five generic conflict managing strategies based on the combinations of two significant dimensions, namely the level to which a company tries to satisfy its own concerns and the level to which a company tries to address the concerns of the employees. Research conducted by Vliert and Kabanoff (2009) appears to yield support for these dimensions. The five conflict managing strategies as proposed by Thomas and Kilmann (1976) are as follows: accommodation, avoidance, collaborating, competition and compromise. This is graphically shown below.

Fig. 2.2: Strategies for managing conflict



**Source:** Adapted from Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann, 1976, p.11.

The figure shown above explains the five different approaches for responding to conflict situations. In the context of accommodation, the approach allows the other party to achieve what they desire from the situation. In other words, accommodation deals with understanding the concerns or desires of other members and acceding to them. However, McCarthy (1996) says that accommodation satisfies and placates. Accommodating involves being unassertive and cooperative. This is the complete opposite of competing mode. When someone accommodates, he/she neglects his/her own concerns to satisfy the concerns of another person. According to Shell (2001), there is some element of self-sacrifice displayed in this approach. Similarly, accommodating may take the form of selfless generosity, benevolence, charity, obeying another person's authority or abiding by someone's order.

Concerning avoidance, this is an approach in which one party tries to avoid any open confrontation or hostile situation. This requires one party in the conflict to ignore the problem, or simply not show willingness to engage with the issue (McCarthy, 1996). Avoiding is unassertive and uncooperative - the person neither pursues his own concerns nor those of the other individual. Thus, he does not deal with the conflict. Avoiding could take the form of diplomatically sidestepping an issue, postponing an issue until a better time or simply withdrawing from a threatening situation (Shell, 2001). In a study conducted by Tang and Kirkbride (2012) in which they measured the conflict styles of Hong Kong Chinese and

British executives in the Hong Kong civil service, it was discovered from the findings that the Chinese managers were higher on the avoiding style in managing their conflict.

In the context of competition, this approach reflects the win-at-all-costs situation to conflict resolution. In Jehn's (1997) view, competition has little or no consideration of the other individuals' interests in the situation, rather it only concentrates on the desires of the 'self' in the process. In negotiation terms, competition represents the view that anything conceded is something lost. Competing is assertive and uncooperative when a person pursues his/her own concerns at the other person's expense. From all indications, competition is concerned with winning and occupying a position in the organisation. According to Jehn (1997), competition deals with strategically withholding information and using tactics to manipulate other workers to capitulate. Competition approach is based on the concerns of the competitor; it refuses to take into account other employees' concerns (Sorenson, 1999). Additionally, competition is associated with a negative consequence because a competitor prevents others from achieving their goals which may generate negative emotions such as anger, stress and distrust in the organisation (Jehn, 1997). In spite of the negative effects of the competing approach, it means standing up for one's rights, defending a position which one believes is correct (Mujtaba, Chawavisit & Pattaratalwanich, 2010).

Compromise represents the search for the acceptable (McCarthy, 1996). In other words, compromise comprises each group giving in to the other group to find an acceptable solution. However, compromise is a 'fixed-pie' approach, this is because something is given up, and nobody feels fully satisfied (Sorenson, 1999). Compromising approach is moderate in both assertiveness and cooperativeness (Thomas & Kilmann, 1976). The objective in this approach is to find some expedient, mutually acceptable resolution that may partially satisfy the two parties in the conflict.

Collaborating is both assertive and cooperative in nature (Sorenson, 1999). The collaborating approach is the complete opposite of the avoiding mode. A collaborating situation involves an attempt by an individual to work with others in order to find a solution that will satisfy all concerns. In other words, this invariably means ploughing into an issue to address the underlying needs and wants of the two parties. Collaborating between two groups may take the form of exploring the area of differences in order to learn from each other's insights.

## **2.10 Managing conflict through communication**

According to Cahn and Abigail (2013), organisational conflict manifests because of poor communication. Rahim (2011) argues that communication is the central element in all interpersonal conflict. Cahn and Abigail (2013, p. 45) opine that communication and conflict are related in three ways, such as:

- a) Communication behaviour reflects conflict,
- b) Communication is the vehicle for the productive or destructive management of conflict, and
- c) Communication behaviour often creates conflict.

According to Cahn and Abigail (2013), communication-based barriers in the organisation may be the result of differences in speaking styles, writing styles and poor body language. Poor communication results from misperceptions and misunderstandings between employees and employer, and as a result it may lead to long-standing conflict in the organisation.

Aside from verbal communication which is necessary in managing organisational conflict, non-verbal communication plays a big role in conflict management. During conflict in an organisation, the most significant information is exchanged through non-verbal means (Cahn & Abigail, 2013). According to Kohlrieser (2006), the features of employees' non-verbal communication expression are emotionally-driven facial expressions, pace, tone of words, posture, gesture and intensity of voice. The communication which is worthy of giving attention to in a workplace is 'wordless' communication (Kohlrieser, 2006). This is because wordless communication is difficult if not impossible to interpret and understand. Kohlrieser (2006) argues that in organisational conflict it is useful for the manager to pay close attention to the employees' non-verbal signals. According to Kohlrieser (2006), this will help to understanding what the employees are really saying and help to address their problems. The ability to understand employees' problems depends on the emotional awareness of the employer.

In addition to the above, humour can be an effective way of managing organisational conflict. Most confrontations and disagreements in the organisation can be eschewed through communication in a humorous way. For instance, a manager should be able to deal with his/her employees with a great sense of humour. It is believed that this will reduce tension

and anger, and therefore brings about greater connection and cohesion in the organisation (Bodtker & Katz Jameson, 2001). In their study, Segal and Smith (2011, p.23) give the following suggestions for successful conflict management:

- a) It is important to listen to employees' complaints, either verbal or non-verbal. Giving employees attention will enable the employer to understand the employees.
- b) Workers in an organisation should demand what is feasible from the management of the organisation, not outrageous demands which may result in the closure of the company.

## **2.11 Negotiation in organisational conflict**

Negotiation is conceptualised as a discussion among people to reach a conclusion acceptable to one and all (Montoya-Weiss, Massey & Song, 2001). According to Rahim (2011), this is a process where individuals, rather than fighting among themselves, sit together, evaluate the pros and cons and then come out with an alternative which would be a win-win situation for all (Montoya-Weiss, Massey & Song, 2001). Furthermore, Grossett and Venter (2011) state negotiation take place between representatives of the parties involved rather than between all members of the labour relationship. Tinsley (1998) argues that in negotiation employer and employees try their level best to come to a conclusion which would satisfy all. In negotiation, Grossett and Venter (2011) say that the matter that also comes under discussion range from economic issues like salaries and wages to administrative issues such as the provision of basic conditions of employment, grievances procedures, disciplinary procedures, promotions, transfers and methods used to grade jobs. Besides reaching an agreement on issues of common and mutual interest in the employees-employer relationship, negotiation tries to correct the imbalance of power in the relationship (Grossett & Venter, 2011). However, this occurs because the parties are dependent on each other to meet their respective goals.

### **2.11.1 Negotiation between workers and employer**

In an organisation, workers have to negotiate with their manager so that they are assigned the responsibilities as per their interests and specialisation. Oetzel and Ting-Toomey (2003) argue that an employer should not accept anything he/she is not comfortable with. The scholar went on to say that it is better for an employer to sit with their employee and discuss things with him. For instance, suppose your employer or manager wants you to prepare a

report on branding and marketing strategies of the organisation, and marketing was never your specialisation. It is appropriate that the worker should not accept such responsibility just because it is the boss who has told them to do it. From all indications, Oetzel and Ting-Toomey (2003) report that it is better to negotiate with the boss and tell him that you could probably cover some other subject and somebody else should be told to prepare the report on marketing and branding. Tinsley (1998) contains that it is better to negotiate in the first instance to avoid conflicts and misunderstandings at a later stage.

Oetzel and Ting-Toomey (2003) opine that negotiation is important among workers to reduce the chances of disputes and conflicts. Any particular worker should not be over-burdened while the other member is relaxing (Tinsley, 1998). A worker should negotiate with his fellow workers and accept only those responsibilities he/she feels he/she is capable of doing. Lewicki, Weiss and Lewin (2013) observe that the responsibility of achieving targets should not rest on only one person's shoulders; rather it should be equally divided among all workers. The scholars opine that it is better to negotiate with other workers and accept the responsibilities willingly.

## **2.12 Types of organisational negotiation**

According to Rahim (2011), there are three types of organisational negotiations, namely commercial, legal and managerial negotiations.

### **2.12.1 Commercial negotiations**

Zartman (2007) contains that commercial negotiations are generally done in the form of contract. Two different individuals or employer and employees will sit face to face across the table and discuss issues between them and come to conditions acceptable to both the parties (Zartman, 2007). In such a situation everything discussed and agreed upon should be in black and white. However, when the contract is signed by the parties involved, they have to adhere to its terms and conditions.



### **2.12.2 Legal negotiation**

According to Zartman (2007), legal negotiation takes place between employer and employees and the law where the parties have to abide by the rules and regulations laid out by the legal system, and the legal system also takes into account the needs and interest of the parties. This negotiation is often formal and legally binding by all parties. Disagreement over precedents can become as significant as the main issue (Zartman, 2007).

### **2.12.3 Managerial negotiation**

According to Zartman (2007), managerial negotiation is done within the organisation and is related to the internal problems in the organisation. It is in regards to the working relationship between the employees and the management of the organisation. Often, the employer needs to interact with the employees at different levels in the organisational structure (Movius & Susskind, 2009). For conducting the daily business of the organisation, the employer or manager needs to allot job responsibilities, maintain a flow of information, direct the record keeping and many more activities for smooth functioning (Zartman, 2007). From all indications, this involves entering into a negotiation with the parties.

## **2.13 Approaches to negotiation**

Rahim (2011) identifies two approaches to negotiation, namely competitive and collaborative negotiations.

### **2.13.1 Competitive negotiation**

This is based on the assumption that although there may be areas of common agreement, the fundamental interests of labour and management is in conflict with one another. In competitive negotiation, the players seek to win at the expense of the opposing party (Rahim, 2011). It is believed that if a player does not exploit the other he/she will be exploited. Therefore, the two parties are always on guard expecting to be tricked, however, the players involved have to adopt a 'wait and see' game to see what concession is granted before granting concession themselves (Rahim, 2011). The climate created for competitive negotiation is important to the parties involved in the negotiation. Bazerman (2000) argues

that a relaxed, open and easy-going atmosphere is not welcome, rather, an atmosphere that is courteous yet business-like that encourages quick action is appropriate.

### **2.13.2 Collaborative negotiation**

Collaborative negotiation deals with a win-win situation. According to Hellriegel et al. (1998), collaborative negotiation is based on the assumption that although differences in needs are acknowledged, the fundamental interests of labour and management are said to be complementary. In collaborative negotiation, the problem is set to be mutually defined, explored and resolved (Rahim, 2011).

### **2.14 The skills of a negotiator in an organisation**

There are many skills which a negotiator in an organisation should possess. Grossett and Venter (2011) say that for a negotiator to be effective, he/she should have the following skills listed below:

- a) **Role of personality in negotiation:** Liu, Friedman and Hong (2012) observe that an impressive personality goes hand in hand with good communication for effective negotiation in an organisation. However, Rahim (2011) argues that an amiable personality is important for effective negotiation in an organisation.
- b) **Negotiator must try to be his/herself:** A negotiator should not fake things or pretend to be effective. He/she should be his/herself.
- c) **It's important to be sincere:** Sincerity is one of the major personality traits required in negotiation (Grossett & Venter, 2011). A negotiator has to be sincere for an effective negotiation.
- d) **Be honest:** During negotiations, honesty plays a significant role. He/she should be above board in all his/ her dealings.
- e) **Negotiator should go smartly dressed for a negotiation:** How a negotiator dresses plays a significant role in enhancing his/her personality. Therefore, a negotiator should dress 'decently'.
- f) **Be Patient:** Grossett and Venter (2011) observed that impatient persons are poor negotiators. Therefore, they argue that a negotiator needs to be patient in order to achieve his/her goal for the organisation

- g) Negotiator should be tactful and diplomatic:** For a negotiator to be diplomatic does not mean being clever. Rather, he/she needs to be intelligent and should know what and how to speak. According to Grossett and Venter (2011), a negotiator should analyse the situation and respond accordingly.

It would be out of place to conclude that the aim of the negotiator or team of negotiators is to reach an agreement in a conflict in an organisation. However, the agreement should be mutually acceptable not only to the other negotiator involved, but also to his/her own constituencies (Grossett & Venter, 2011).

The conclusion of this section on negotiation leads to another important section of this dissertation which is theory adopted for the study.

## **2.15 Theoretical framework of the study**

In this section, the researcher explains the theory adopted for the study.

## **2.16 General system theory**

In this study, the researcher will adopt a general system theory to unpack ways in which managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd. The term 'general systems theory' (*Allgemeine Systemlehre*) was developed by the Austrian biologist known as Ludwig von Bertalanffy. This theory originated in the natural sciences in an effort to understand sets of objects, the relationships between those objects, and the relationship between sets of objects and their environments (Corlett, 2010). In other words, general system theory is a theory of complex interacting components together with the relationships among them that permit the identification of a boundary-maintaining entity or process (Von Bertalanffy, 1976). The main concept in general system theory is that the nature of a system's existence depends on holism, meaning that interdependence, feedback and feed-forward loops and dynamic equilibrium are necessary for change, creativity, innovation, and thus survival. General system theory, just like other innovative frameworks of thought, went through different phases of ridicule and neglect (Laszlo & Krippne, 1998). According to Corlett (2012), this theory has benefited from the parallel emergence, however it has risen to eminence of cybernetics and information theory, and their widespread applications to originally quite distant fields of study. Despite the fact

that this general system theory has grown out of organismic biology, it has soon branched into most of the humanities and organisations. However, its recognition as a platform for the study of human behaviour has led to recent applications in areas of business organisation, politics and geography, among others. The rise and spread of the theory has been assisted by societal pressures on science demanding for the development of theories capable of interdisciplinary application (Laszlo & Krippne, 1998). Additionally, several conceptual frameworks of the systems approach and other related fields have much to give for the construction of a holistic methodology for perceptual inquiry. Prigogine (2012) argues that the basis for any natural law describing the evolution of social systems must be the physical laws governing open systems, that is, systems entrenched in their environment with which they exchange matter and energy. Laszlo and Krippne (1998) contain that without reducing the study of psyche to physics, general system theory offers a powerful conceptual approach for grasping the interrelation of human beings, and the associated cognitive structures and processes specific to them, in both society and nature.

## **2.17 Business organisation as a system**

Daft (2007) defines a system as a set of interacting elements acquiring inputs from the environment, transforming them and discharging outputs to the external environment. An organisation is a complex and open system (Daft, 2007). This is because like an organism, they are open to, and interact with, their environment. The business organisation is a man-made system which has a dynamic interplay with its environment that is customers, competitors, labour organisations, suppliers, government, and many other agencies (Malhadas, 2010). In addition, the business organisation is a system of interrelated parts working in conjunction with each other in order to achieve a number of goals for the organisation and the workers. The analogy with the organisation gives us a better understanding of the scope of general system theory. This is because as Malhadas (2010, p. 18) reports:

- a) The organisation has qualities or features that none of its members possess individually;
- b) The features of the organisation are reflected in the behaviour of each of its members, if it is united as a whole and each member acts in accordance with this stipulated standard;

- c) An event involving the whole (for instance, the entry of a new competitor in the market) affects each member in the organisation. The extent to which this occurs depends solely on the features of the system;
- d) An event that affects one of the members (for instance, the emergence of a new possibility of employment for an employee in another organisation) has an effect on the whole and on all others. However, the effects will be higher or lower depending also on the features of the system;
- e) That each individual member of the organisation has the same behaviours and characteristics that lead to it. People outside the organisation easily identify those points in common to its members, as is evidenced by the way people behave within it.

In general system theory, it is emphasised that in analysing what happens to a company or an organisation, various networks of influence have to be looked into. Relying on the above assertion, Fujimoto (2001) argues that the low turnover experienced in 1994 in automobile companies in Japan is a function of non-performance of a marketing department, not that of the production department. In a similar vein, a 'system' can be viewed from the perspective of a delivery company which transports goods from the company to the customers. However, if the transport company breaks down the customers would not be able to get the goods, also the company will not make a profit and hence the workers may likely lose jobs. It can be argued that the transport company is a subsystem, customers are also a subsystem, and the company that produces the goods is a subsystem, therefore, each of these subsystems in turn, configure a system in itself (a whole, with its respective parts). Morgan (2009) opines that the organisation not only contain individuals (which is a subsystem), but it consists of other departments that help each other to accomplish its goals. In a similar circumstance, the concept of the business enterprise as a social system has more than before received substantial attention in recent time. The proponents of a system theory look at the organisation as a system of cultural interrelationships. This is because of the recognition of certain elements that act within a total integrated system (Morgan, 2009). Kouzes and Posner (2002) argue that the environment in which an organisation exists is itself changing at an increasing rate, and toward increasing complexity. According to Silva (2008, p.23), the adaptive nature and dynamics of a system can be understood after an examination of four of its basic features:

- (a) interaction with the environment (lack of self-sufficiency of the systems),

- (b) synergy (the result of an open system is always greater than the sum of the parts involved),
- (c) economic balance (process of maintaining internal balance by obtaining resources from the environment), and
- (d) equifinality (reaching the same result by different means).

Based on this assertion, the study of conflict in an organisation should be expanded beyond the boundaries of the system. In other words, the sources and consequences of the conflict in the organisation should be searched and examined outside its neighbourhood (Fiorelli, Fiorello & Knitwear, 2008).

## **2.18 Conflict as a system**

Conflict is a very complex system with adaptive structures and evolutionary mechanisms (Gallo, 2012). The system theory has advantages for the study of organisational conflict especially with regard to the actions of those concerned with their management and/or resolution. However, through system theory one can see a situation in which conflict in the workplace is antecedent to what occurs in the family or, inversely, that the differences at home result from stress in the workplace (Fischman, 1998). However, Luhmann (2009) sees conflict as the construction of a catalytic system which for some reasons is formed inside other systems, and does not acquire the status of a major system, but is rather seen as parasitic. Furthermore, Luhmann says that conflict is a 'subsystem' in itself, because it does or does not allow other subsystems which oppose its view to function effectively and efficiently.

In sharp contrast, Oyebade (2011) sees conflict as a system which is open to other subsystems to interact within. Conflict is a system which is made up of interconnected parts that, as a whole, exhibit components which cannot easily be understood only by dissecting and analysing the properties of the individual components (Gallo, 2012). Oyebade (2011) says that employees, employer, unionism and demands are some of the subsystems in conflict and they are the key players in organisational conflict. It is worthy to mention that the escalation or resolution of conflict in an organisation lies in their hands. Relying on the above assertion, Oyebade (2011) argues that it is a set of components (subsystems) interrelating for a purpose that relates to the purpose of the larger system.

### **2.19 Application of system theory in the study**

The system theory finds fertile ground in this study precisely because the organisation (Automouldam (Pty) Ltd) in which the study is conducted represents a place of intersection of several distinct social worlds (many other systems). However, this organisation has its own cultural beliefs and values, and its members (subsystems) have different interests, different goals and seek to fight, proposing or undoing political alliances to achieve their goals (Berger, 1989). Therefore, this theory will be used to understand the causes of conflict in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd. Furthermore, the theory will be used to explain the importance of a good working relationship and the desire of the different sectors to respect each other's interests, goals, values among others, for efficient organisational productivity.

### **2.20 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the researcher was able to tease out the different definitions of conflict, types of conflict and orientation to conflict. The researcher gave an explanation of the causes of conflict in organisations, effects of conflict, managing conflict strategies and managing conflict through communication in an organisation. Furthermore, the importance of negotiation and the characteristics of a negotiator in organisational conflicts were discussed. Additionally, the system theory was adopted as a theoretical framework to understand ways in which managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd.

In the next chapter of this dissertation, the researcher will look into the research methodology used in the study.

## **Chapter three**

### **Research methodology and design**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In chapter two of this dissertation, the researcher focused on the review of related literature and the theoretical framework adopted for the study. However, chapter three will deal with the research methodology and design. Effort will be made to elucidate the research methodology and design adopted for the study. The population, sampling technique and sample size for the study will be clearly explained. The research instruments, methods of data gathering and data analysis will be teased out. Finally, the researcher will discuss all the ethical issues that will be adhered to while conducting the study.

#### **3.2 Research methodology**

Research methodology connotes the procedural rules for the evaluation of research claims and the validation of the knowledge gathered (Wellington, 2015). Furthermore, Ellis and Levy (2009) conceptualise research methodology as academia's established regulatory framework for both the collection and evaluation of existing knowledge for the purpose of arriving at, and/or validating new knowledge. Gray (2013) maintains that the determination of the research methodology is one of the key challenges which confront researchers. This is because the quality and value of any research is largely predicated on the extent to which the researcher has clearly articulated his/her methodology. Accordingly, given the importance of research methodology to any research study, the researcher shall outline and justify the current research's selected methodological design. In light of the above, the researcher decided to adopt a qualitative approach.

##### **3.2.1 Qualitative approach**

Having gone through a myriad of scholarly works, the researcher discovered that a greater number of researchers and scholars made use of the quantitative approach in conducting research on conflict management. For instance, Aquino (2000), Booysen (2013), Uchendu, Anijaobi and Odigwe (2013), Omisore and Abiodun (2014) and Longe (2015) adopted quantitative approaches in their studies. However, in this study the researcher adopts a



qualitative approach. The choice of the qualitative approach is informed by the nature of the study under investigation. Moreover, qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have (Merriam, 2009). From all indications, the qualitative approach is deemed appropriate for analysing participants' feelings, beliefs, ideas, thoughts and actions (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Merriam (2009) argues that a qualitative approach is appropriate when description and explanation is sought and when it is not possible or feasible to manipulate the potential causes of behaviour. It is based more on what is known as naturalistic phenomenological philosophy, which assumes that multiple realities are socially constructed through individual and collective definitions of the situation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Based on the above discussion, the researcher decides to adopt a qualitative research methodology in order to gather enough information and also give a thick or an in-depth description of the ways in which the managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd.

The qualitative approach is characterised by some distinctive characteristics. These characteristics are: naturalistic inquiry, process, insider perspective, description and understanding, contextual interest, idiographic research strategy and inductive approach (Babbie & Mouton, 2007, p.42). Naturalistic inquiry is the study of the real world situation as it unfolds naturally, in a non-manipulative and non-controlling manner. This approach is often non-manipulative, which means that it tends to focus on situations and objects that are natural like the one under investigation. The word 'natural' connotes a normal course of events (Eisner, 1998) in which that event evolves. It observes an event and action as it happens without any intervention or interference (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). It is especially appropriate for this study since it unravels the ways in which managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency. Meanwhile, the aim of most qualitative researchers is to blend in and become participants of the event that they investigate in the least interventionist way conceivable (Babbie & Mouton, 2007). Resting on the above premise, the researcher adopts a qualitative approach in order to submerge himself in the process of the investigation.

In the context of the 'process', qualitative researchers emphasise the process instead of simply concerning themselves with the outcome. According to Babbie and Mouton (2007), a qualitative investigator is in the position to examine the rumblings and final explosion of the

riot as an event actually occurs rather than afterwards in a reconstruction of the same. The reconstruction of an event in retrospect is at variance with the ideals of the investigator of the qualitative study method. In a qualitative approach, the researcher wants to understand how events take place, as well as what they are. In this study, the ways in which managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency will be better understood using the qualitative research approach.

From the insider's perspective, the main characteristic of a qualitative study is the ability of the researcher to see an event through the eyes of the actors. For a social scientist to embark on an investigation of a social phenomenon, in most cases he/she has to be part and parcel of the phenomenon under investigation in order to have a clear understanding of the event. In order to have a clear picture of the conflict management strategies in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd, the researcher was able to view it from the perspective of the stakeholders. Relating to this position of the phenomenologist roots of qualitative research, Taylor and Bogdan (1998, p. 26) say:

The phenomenologist views human behaviour as a product of how people interpret their world. The task of the phenomenologist and the qualitative methodologist is to capture this process of interpretation. In order to grasp the meanings of a person's behaviour, the phenomenologist attempts to see things from that point of view.

In the area of description and understanding, a qualitative investigator knows what he/she looks out for or what he/she is interested in by describing an event as it occurs in a natural setting or real world situation. A qualitative researcher is committed to the naturalistic perspective and to the interpretive understanding of human experience (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Furthermore, every qualitative researcher believes that in-depth and rich descriptions of the social world are valuable (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). It is the view of the researcher that qualitative practitioners rely heavily on rich and in-depth descriptions of an event as it was. However, Babbie and Mouton (2007) argue that an in-depth description is usually a lengthy description that captures the sense of actions as they occur, and places events in contexts that are understandable to the actors themselves. Therefore, understanding ways in which managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency required a rich and in-depth description.

For contextual interest (understanding in context), there is a strong affinity between textual interpretation and the epistemology of the behavioural science (Blanche, Kelly & Durrheim, 2007). The model of *verstehen* (understanding), which is the creation of Bleicher (1980), held

that the meaning of a written text would be established through piecing together the context of the text's creation and thereby creating the meaning of the author's words. It is not only important to comprehensively understand the actor's specific communicative intentions. Eisner (1998) opines that it is necessary to include in the operation of *verstehen* a knowledge of the socio-historical and linguistic context in which the author worked. In social sciences, however, the meaning of human creations, words, actions and experiences can only be understood in relation to the context in which it occurs (Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2007). As a qualitative researcher, the researcher has preference for understanding how the managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd.

From the idiographic research strategy point of view, a qualitative approach dwells mainly on idiographic strategy because of its interest in the contextual understanding of the event. It is unlike a quantitative approach which deals with nomothetic strategy, the aim of which is to search for empirical regularities of laws of human behaviour. Idiographic strategy looks at a single event and its structural coherence within a larger context (Babbie & Mouton, 2007). The identification of the distinction which exists between idiographic and nomothetic strategies has been clearly discussed in Windelband (1980, p.175), thus:

In their quest for knowledge of reality, the empirical sciences either seek the general in the form of the law of nature or the particular in the form of the historically defined structure. On the one hand, they are concerned with the form which invariably remains constant. On the other hand, they are concerned with the unique, immanently defined content of the real event. Scientific thought is nomothetic in the former case and idiographic in the latter case.

From the above assertion, developing conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd is specific and unique. Therefore, the researcher's interest here is to describe the event as it is. In the area of inductive strategy, a qualitative researcher begins with immersion in the natural setting, describing events as accurately as possible, as they occur or have occurred, and slowly but surely building second-order constructs, a hypothesis and ultimately a theory that will make sense of the observation (Babbie & Mouton, 2007). Apparently, Silverman (2013) opines that qualitative study focuses on observing, interviewing, recording, listening, describing, interpreting and appraising settings as they are. This led to another important issue in the study which is the paradigm that will be adopted for the study.

### **3.3 Paradigm of the study**

In line with the adoption of a qualitative approach, it is appropriate to align this study within the interpretive paradigm. The term ‘paradigm’ comes from a Greek word *paradeigma*. Guba and Lincoln (2000) and Healy and Perry (2000) argue that a paradigm comprises of fundamental assumptions in relation to the world, the place of the individual in it, and the relationship between the world and the researcher. Healy and Perry’s position on the paradigm was further amplified by Blanche and Durrheim (2007) who submitted that a paradigm is an all-encompassing system of interrelated practice and thinking that define for researchers the nature of their enquiry. This view held by Blanche and Durrheim makes a paradigm to be viewed as a pattern of beliefs and practices that regulate inquiry within a discipline by providing lenses, frames and processes through which investigation is accomplished (Banister, 2011). Paradigm addresses a fundamental assumption which is taken on faith by a researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 2000). Furthermore, it is a framework that contains all commonly accepted views about a subject, a structure of what direction research should take and how it should be performed (McGregor & Murnane, 2010). Additionally, Jonker and Pennink (2010) opine that a research paradigm is a set of fundamental assumptions and beliefs as to how the world is perceived which then serves as a thinking framework that guides the behaviour of the researcher. What is important to understand at this point is that, by following a particular paradigm, a researcher adopts a specific way of studying phenomena relevant to his/her field. Understanding what paradigm or research tradition a researcher subscribes to is very important. This is because as Du Plooy-Cilliers and Bezuidenhout (2014) observe, it determines what questions are considered worthy of investigation and what processes are required for these questions to be acceptable. From the above discussion, the researcher adopts an interpretive paradigm for the study.

#### **3.3.1 Interpretive paradigm**

Historically, interpretive paradigm has its roots in hermeneutics which is the study of the theory and practice of interpretation. According to Klein and Myer (1999, p.69), an interpretive researcher assumes that “our knowledge of reality is gained only through social construction such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, documents, tools and other artefacts.” In a similar circumstance, Gephardt and Richardson (2008) argue that in an interpretive approach it is believed that the reality consists of people’s subjective experiences

of the external world; thus, they may adopt an inter-subjective epistemology and the ontological belief that reality is socially constructed. In addition, Lawthom and Tindall (2011) argue that interpretive researchers assume that people construct and merge their own subjective and intersubjective meanings as they interact with the world. According to Wright and Losekoot (2010), an interpretive researcher seeks to understand studied people through accessing the meanings that research participants attach to those social worlds. To be specific, an interpretive paradigm supports researchers in terms of exploring their world by interpreting the understanding of individuals (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Interpretive researchers argue for the uniqueness of human inquiry, therefore, to completely comprehend human action by means of interpretations is to argue for an altogether different aim from natural science. This assertion was strongly supported by Erickson (2012, p.98) when he reported that:

If people take action on the ground of their interpretation of the actions of others, then meaning of interpretations themselves are causal for humans. This is not true in nature. This billiard ball does not make sense of its environment. But the human actor in society does, and different humans make sense differently. They impute meaning to others' actions and take their own actions in accord with the meaning of interpretations they have made.

To interpretive researchers, knowledge is generated in the form of interpretive understanding that informs and guides practical judgement (Carr & Kemmis, 2003).

However, the main challenge with the interpretive paradigm is the belief in the possibility of achieving one acceptable interpretation. Critics such as Nieuwenhuis (2012) hold that there are no stable grounds for judgement, and thereby running the risk of foundering in a quagmire of subjectivism and relativism. Furthermore, it is believed that the interpretive paradigm abandons the scientific procedures of verification, therefore, findings of the study cannot be generalised to other situations. In spite of the shortcomings of the interpretive paradigm, its adoption in this study was to assist the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of ways in which the managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd.

### **3.4 Ontological and epistemological assumptions**

In this section, the researcher will discuss the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin the study.

#### **3.4.1 Ontological assumption**

The term ‘ontology’ which is used today by social scientists, was borrowed from philosophy. From all indications, ontology is the science or study of being (Crotty, 2003). According to Gruber (1993), ontology is a formal, explicit specification of a shared conceptualisation. Ontology is defined by Ding and Foo (2001) as shared understanding of some domains of interest, which is often conceived as a set of classes (concepts), relations, functions, axioms and instances. Fundamentally, ontology is concerned with the question of how the world is built (Marsh & Furlong, 2002). It is the claim and assumption made about the nature of a social reality, claim about what exists, what it looks like, what units make it up and how the said units interact with one another (Blaikie, 2000).

The main ontological assumption in social science research is that the social world and what passes as ‘reality’ is a projection of individual consciousness, an act of creative imagination and of dubious inter-subjective status (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). Bryman (2001) contains that ‘reality’ is masked by those human processes which judge and interpret the phenomenon in consciousness prior to the full understanding of the structure of the meaning it expresses. Ontological assumption is concerned with what one believes constitutes social reality (Blaikie, 2000). ‘Reality’ in this case is socially and discursively constructed. From the point of an interpretive researcher, the social world is what people perceive it to be. It is fluid and fragile and changes as people’s perceptions change (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). Therefore, the ontological assumption of this study is that reality is apprehendable in the context of ways in which managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd. Understandably, the adoption of an interpretive paradigm in the study lay and provided the solid foundation in which ontological assumption of the study was anchored.

### **3.4.2 Epistemological assumption**

On the other hand, epistemology is concerned with the theory of knowledge. In other words, it focuses on what constitutes acceptable knowledge in the field of study (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007). According to Crotty (2003), it is a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know. However, Grix (2002) contains that epistemology deals with how what is assumed to have existed can be known. The epistemological orientation in social inquiry focuses on the knowledge-generation process and ways of developing new theories which are better than rival theories. However, the process of knowledge generation is unceasingly changing, never in a static or constant position. Epistemological assumption in any research focuses on how we know, with the nature of knowledge, with what constitutes knowledge, with where knowledge comes from and whose knowledge it is, and with what it is possible to know and understand and re-present (Wellington, Bathmaker, Hunt, McCulloch & Sikes, 2005).

The questions which are uppermost in the mind of any social phenomena researcher are: how do we know what we know? What is the state of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known? What counts as knowledge? From the interpretive paradigm which the researcher adopted for this study, knowledge is established through the meanings that are attached to the phenomenon under investigation. An interpretive researcher believes that facts are not objective and neutral, instead, what is factual depends heavily on the context and one's interpretation of information (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). For instance, one can only assign appropriate meaning to an act if he/she takes into the social context in which the act happens. Because Finlayson (2007) argues that an interpretive investigator believes that truth is dependent on one's interpretation of the fact on the ground, he/she is not interested in generalisation of the findings. Therefore, the research methodology adopted is sensitive to the specific context and never generalised beyond the context in which the study is investigated. Relying on the above assertion, the ontological and epistemological assumptions of this study are to understand ways in which the managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd.

### **3.5 Research site**

It is pertinent to state beforehand that due to ethical issue, the researcher will not give a vivid description of location of the company under investigation. Geographically, Automouldam (Pty) Ltd is located in Central Durban in the KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa. The company was established in January of 1984 when five individuals with entrepreneurial flair pooled their resources together and set about starting a plastics business. Since these individuals had substantial experience in different aspects of injection moulding, they named the company Automouldam (Pty) Ltd. The factory was purposefully designed and built to optimise the efficiency levels of a plastic injection moulding operation. In other words, the company is known for the manufacturing of plastic and other allied products. Currently, the company is a long-standing supplier of plastic accessories to a large variety of companies including Toyota SA, Volkswagen SA, Daimler Chrysler SA, Feltex Ltd., Defy Appliances, Johnson Controls, Faurecia, Takata Petri, Grupo Antolin and Toyota Boshoku to mention a few. The company has a total staff strength of 126. Out of this number, about 15 are in managerial positions, 32 are in middle level manpower and the remaining 79 are the casual workers.

### **3.6 Case study design**

Based on the adoption of qualitative and interpretive approaches for the study, it is appropriate to adopt a case study research design. Yin (2011) defines a case study as a research approach used in various situations to add to knowledge and understanding of an individual, group, organisation or social, political and related phenomena. In a similar circumstance, Crowe, Cresswell, Robertson, Huby, Avery and Sheikh (2011) conceptualise a case study as a research approach which is used to generate an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of a complex issue in its real-life context. Yin (2009), Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) contain that a social unit may be a country, school, organisation or a person.

According to Lizarondo, Grimmer-Somers and Kumar (2011), a case study approach is of great value when the rationale of the study is on extensively exploring and understanding rather than confirming and quantifying. As stated by Stake (1995), a case study is the study of particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances. Siggelkow's (2007) explanation on persuasiveness provides a



compelling argument for the appropriateness of the case study design, even from a single case, to contribute to a deep understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Many novice researchers often worry when they use a case study approach in a research. Yin (2013, p. 12) lists the grounds where a researcher should use a case study to include: the focus of the study is to answer 'how,' 'what' and 'why' research questions; one cannot manipulate the behaviour of the research participants involved in the study; one may want to cover contextual conditions because the researchers believe it is relevant to the phenomenon under investigation, and the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context.

Drawing from Yin's (2013) position, this researcher opted for the case study approach not only because of answering the 'how,' 'what' and 'why' research questions which was earlier stated, but in order to understand without manipulation the ways that the managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd. Furthermore, the adoption of a case study approach in the study is to reveal the thoughts, motivations, and inner feelings of the research participants in relation to the subject of the case study, bounded by the context of the study itself which are the people, the places, and the events.

### **3.7 Population of the study**

Walker (2005) defines population as an aggregate or totality of all the objects, subjects or members that conform to a set of specifications. In a similar circumstance, Samkange (2009) conceptualises a population in any research as the entire aggregation of participants that meet the designated set of criteria. Therefore, the target population in this study is the entire group of workers at Automouldam (Pty) Ltd. For clarity purposes, the researcher wants to state that there are about 126 staff performing different jobs in the company, hence this number of staff constitutes the target population for the study.

#### **3.7.1 Purposive sampling strategy**

For the purpose of this study, purposive sampling will be adopted. Purposive sampling is a non-random technique that does not need underlying theories or a set number of informants. According to Maree (2011), purposive sampling is synonymous with qualitative studies. This is because there are many objectives that qualitative investigators might have. Lewis and

Sheppard (2006) contain that in purposive sampling the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find participants who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience. Purposive sampling technique is especially exemplified through the key informant technique (Tongco, 2007). However, the reason for the use of the purposive sampling technique is to ensure that specific element(s) which satisfy some pre-determined criteria are selected in this study. This assertion is supported by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) who argue that in purposive sampling a researcher relies on his/her experience, ingenuity or previous research experience and findings to deliberately obtain units of analysis in such a way that the sample one obtains may be regarded as being a representation of the relevant population.

### **3.7.2 Eligibility criteria of the participants**

In line with the qualitative research and purposive sampling technique adopted, the following criteria were set for the selection of the participants for the study.

- a) Workers must be permanent in the company.
- b) Workers should have worked for more than five years at the company.
- c) Workers' income should be from R3000 per month.
- d) Workers should not have criminal records.
- e) Workers should not be ill at the time of conducting the study.

### **3.7.3 Sampling size**

In line with both qualitative and purposive sampling technique adopted for the study, moreover, based on the criteria stated above, the researcher purposively selected three principal managers, three middle level workers and four casual workers making a total of ten participants to give insight into the ways in which the managers could develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd. My choice of selecting three principal managers, three middle level workers and four casual workers for interview was to ensure a balance views from all the stakeholders in the company.

### **3.7.4 Biographies of the participants**

As earlier stated above, ten participants were selected as the participants for the study. In order to adhere strictly to the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, the researcher would not use their real names, and instead pseudonyms are used.

#### **Patrick**

Patrick is a male. He is about 56 years of age. He possesses a Masters of Business Administration Degree (MBA) and he is the managing director of Automouldam (Pty) Ltd. He is one of the founding members of the company. From the information made available to the researcher, Patrick's monthly income is more than R100 000.

#### **Naidoo**

Naidoo is a male. He is about 52 years of age. He holds a Bachelor of Mechanical Engineering Degree. He is a manager in production and supplies. He has worked at Automouldam (Pty) Ltd for more than 15 years. His monthly salary is R52 000.

#### **Angela**

Angela is a female. She is about 54 years of age. She holds a Master of Public Administration Degree. She is a manager in the human resources department. She has over 13 years' experience on the job and her monthly income stands at R48 000.

#### **Ntokozo**

Ntokozo is a man and he is about 56 years old. Ntokozo has a Diploma in Electrical Engineering. He is a supervisor in the production department of the company. He has worked at the company for over 12 years and his monthly income is R27 000.

#### **Mary**

Mary is a 42-year-old woman. She graduated with a Bachelor of Science Degree in industrial chemistry. She has about 11 years of cognate experience on the job. She is a supervisor in the production department. Her monthly income is R32 000.

**Johnann**

Johnnan is a man of about 54 years of age. He has a diploma in design and draughtsmanship. He is the supervisor. He has over 15 years of cognate experience and his monthly salary is R35 000.

**Makhanya**

Mahanya is a man of 48 years of age. He is a holder of a Matric certificate. He is one of the casual workers in the company. He earns about R6 500 a month and he had worked at the company for over 12 years.

**Londiwe**

Londiwe is a 36-year-old woman. She holds a Matric certificate. She is a casual staff member in the company and has worked at the company for eight years. She receives a monthly salary of R8 020.

**Mpume**

Mpume is a woman of 31 years of age. She holds a Matric certificate. She is a casual worker at the company. She has worked at Automouldam (Pty) Ltd for a period over seven years. She gets a monthly salary of R6 125.

**Mhlongo**

Mhlongo is a male. He has worked as a security guard in the company. Mhlongo has little formal education, but in spite of this he is able to read, write and speak English. He has worked at the company for over 12 years. He receives a monthly income of R6 200.

**3.8 Research instruments**

According to Seaman (2009), 'research instrument' refers to a device used for the collection of information for the research study. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) define a research instrument as the measurement of a tool designed to obtain data on a topic of interest from research subjects. In the study, however, the researcher designed and used two semi-structured interview schedules to elicit information from the research participants. A typical semi-structured interview is a technique which is designed to elicit a vivid picture of the

participant's perspective on the research topic (Milena, Dainora & Alin, 2008). For clarity purposes, the first semi-structured interview schedule is known as Manager Interview Schedule (MIS) and it is meant for the managers. The second instrument is known as Middle and Casual Interview Schedule (MCIS) and it is designed to elicit information from middle and casual workers at the company (see appendix 2 & 3). Each of these interview schedules consist of nine questions which border on the study under investigation. However, the reason for the adoption of two data collection methods in the study is to ensure the trustworthiness of the data and the validity of the research findings.

### **3.9 Ethical issues**

In simple terms, an 'ethic' is a moral principle or a code of conduct that guides the way professionals conduct their jobs. According to Dich, McKee and Porter (2013), ethics refers to norms or standards for conduct that distinguish between right and wrong. However, it helps to determine the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behaviours in research or professional practice. Recently, there has been intense awareness of ethical issues in the conducting of research studies. According to Wassenaar (2007), there are four principles of ethical issues that need to be followed by any researcher in conducting research. Wassenaar highlighted these principles to include: not subjecting the participants to any form of harm, beneficence, respect for autonomy and justice. The following is the explanation of ethical consideration as described by Wassenaar (2007), and this was adhered to strictly in the course of conducting this research.

#### **3.9.1 Harm to participants**

All willing research participants were thoroughly informed beforehand that there will be no potential harm from the study. Although there was no harm, research participants were still given absolute freedom to either share their own narratives or not in whatever way they felt comfortable with.

#### **3.9.2 Violation of the participants' privacy**

In research, privacy connotes the element of participants' privacy, while confidentiality means the handling of information in a confidential manner (Wassenaar, 2007). In this study,

the researcher used pseudonyms when referring to research participants so as to protect their identities and privacy.

### **3.9.3 Informed consent**

In the context of informed consent, accurate and clear information was offered to the research participants so that they would fully comprehend the study and consequently be able to make a voluntary, informed decision about their participation. Emphasis was placed on the participants who understood the purpose of the study and were competent to give consent and of their awareness to be at liberty to withdraw from the study at any time. Furthermore, the researcher requested that all the participants should complete a consent form indicating their willingness to be a part of the research process.

### **3.10 Data generation**

With the application and issuance of the ethical certificate by the University of KwaZulu-Natal, on the 27<sup>th</sup> June 2016, the researcher embarked on the collection of data from staff at the organisation. The researcher carried a voice recorder and field notes. According to Bowbrick (2012), the use of a voice recorder, apart from ensuring the accuracy of the information obtained, also improves the quality of the information where the researcher doing his own interviewing checks the reports against the voices. Additionally, Rapley (2007, p.50) submits thus:

The actual process of making detailed transcripts enables you to become familiar with what you are observing. You have to listen/watch the recording again and again. Through this process you begin to notice the interesting and often subtle ways that people interact. These are the taken-for-granted features of people's talk and interaction that without recordings you would routinely fail to notice, fail to remember, or be unable to record in sufficient detail by taking hand-written notes as it happened.

The above assertion explains the importance of a voice recorder in the research. It is worthy to mention that the researcher used three working days to conduct interviews with the ten participants. In summary, though the interviews went well, they were devoid of some

challenges. The challenges encountered were documented in the limitations of the study (see page 84).

### **3.11 Data analysis**

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011), data analysis is conceptualised as a practice in which unorganised or unfinished data is ordered and organised, so that useful information can be highlighted. In the same vein, Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2011) argue that data analysis involves processing and working with data in order to understand what the data is highlighting and revealing. In a qualitative study, Maree (2011) contains that data analysis is the process of systematically scrutinising and arranging field notes, interview scripts and other materials which a researcher has gathered in the field, in order to increase the researcher's understanding of these and to present findings to others. This study investigates developing conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd. Therefore, the data collected from the field would be subjected to transcription, thereafter, open coding will be used to break down, compare and categorise the data and finally, the coded data will be subjected to thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data.

#### **3.11.1 Transcription of the data**

After the collection of the data, the researcher transcribed the data manually without the use of qualitative analysis software called Nvivo. By working with the data manually from the early phase of the research process allowed the researcher to familiarise himself with the data. This invariably assisted in the ongoing process of analysing and making sense of the participants' narratives. Duranti (2011) defines transcription as a translation or transformation of sound from recordings to text. However, Tilley (2003) opines that the process is a selective one whereby certain features of talk and interaction are transcribed. After the researcher returned from the field, he downloaded recorded materials to his laptop. The researcher began to listen to the information from the participants on the laptop repeatedly. Using a pencil and notebook, the researcher transcribed the recorded data in three weeks. With the completion of data transcription, the researcher subjected it to open coding, which is discussed below.

### **3.11.2 Use of open coding**

As stated above, the transcribed data was subjected to open coding. Open coding consists of labelling concepts and themes which emerged through the narratives, defining and developing categories based on their similar properties and dimensions (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). During the process of open coding, the data was broken down into various sections which were examined and compared for both differences and similarities to emerge. With the completion of open coding, categorisation and themes emerged, which were subjected to analysis known as thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. Similarly, DeSantis and Noel Ugarriza (2000) and Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas (2013) observe that thematic analysis involves the search for and identification of common threads that extend across an entire interview or set of interviews. Based on the above, the adoption of thematic analysis for the study is to provide a purely qualitative, detailed, and nuanced account of data.

### **3.12 Trustworthiness of the data**

In a qualitative research, the issue of trustworthiness is generally questioned by positivists and post-positivists because their concepts of validity and reliability cannot be addressed in the same way in naturalistic work (Shenton, 2004). However, several scholars such as Silverman (2009) have demonstrated how qualitative investigators can incorporate measures that deal with the issue, and researchers such as Guba (1981), Guba and Lincoln (2007), Polkinghorne (2007), Loh (2013) and Anney (2014) have attempted to respond directly to the issues of validity and reliability in qualitative studies. To ensure that the findings of this research are credible, valid and reliable, the researcher made sure that the trustworthiness of the data was assured by adopting triangulation on the methods of data generation. In this study therefore, the researcher used two different interview schedules (MIS and MCIS) to generate information from the managers and other workers in the company. In other words, this study was guided by the credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability and reflexivity as trustworthiness criteria which ensure the rigour of the research findings.



### **3.12.1 Credibility**

Credibility focuses on the issue of ‘fit’ between participants’ views and the researcher’s representation of them (Patton, 2005). This poses the questions of whether the explanation fits the description and whether the said description is credible. In this study therefore, credibility was demonstrated through a number of tactics: participants’ checks, peer debriefing, prolonged engagement and audit trails of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 2007).

### **3.12.2 Transferability**

Transferability deals with the degree to which the findings of a particular research can be applied in another situation. Merriam (2009) argues that transferability is possible in positivist research, because the findings of the particular study on one hand can be applied to a wider population. However, the situation in qualitative study is completely different (Anney, 2014). Flick (2009) opines that it is important to conclude that findings from a qualitative approach are not transferable to another situation. Therefore, the findings of the study will be interpreted and considered carefully as the sample studied which reflects only the views and experiences of the workers in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd.

### **3.12.3 Dependability**

According to Flick (2009), the dependability in qualitative study is the ability to replicate the processes used to obtain research results, even though in different contexts they may be completely different. In this study, dependability is achieved through a process of auditing. In order to ensure dependability is achieved the researcher ensures that the process of conducting the research is logical, traceable and clearly documented (Anney, 2014). In other words, dependability was demonstrated through an audit trail, where the researcher needs to consider whether the research questions are precisely and logically connected to the research purpose and design. From all indications, this was carefully attended to in this study by doing a separate thematic analysis for each of the specific aims of the study.

### **3.12.4 Confirmability**

In the area of confirmability, Patton (1990) aligns objectivity in natural sciences with the use of a research tool that is not dependent on human skill and perception. Patton recognises the challenge of ensuring absolute objectivity, since, as even the questionnaire is designed by the researcher, the intrusion of the biases is inevitable by the researcher. In qualitative research, steps were taken to help ensure that the research findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the participants, instead of the features and preferences of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 2005). In this manner, every attempt was made to ensure that data generation methods were explicit, negative instances of the findings accounted for, strategies for data collection and analysis were all made public, and participants' truthfulness was assessed. In other words, confirmability in the study was concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the researcher's imagination, but are clearly and systematically derived from the data generated.

### **3.12.5 Reflexivity**

In the context of reflexivity, Merriam (2009) argues that a researcher's background and position will affect what he/she chooses to investigate, the angle of the investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions. Therefore, it is important for the researcher to observe and examine himself in relation to the different elements of the research process. Given that the researcher may also have had some degree of bias, he tried to be neutral as much as possible by ensuring that his experiences and views did not influence the participants' position. The researcher wanted the research data to reflect the authentic views and experiences of workers at Automouldam (Pty) Ltd. This was achieved by constantly saying 'this is not a self-study' hence the participants' voices must be heard.

### **3.13 Conclusion**

This chapter dealt with research methodology and design adopted for the study. In this study, it is pertinent to reiterate that a qualitative approach was adopted as a research methodology. In line with this approach adopted, interpretive paradigm was used to understand ways in

which managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd. Based on the fact that this study revolved around a qualitative approach, the researcher adopted a purposive sampling technique to select ten participants for the data generation. Two research instruments (MIS and MCIS) were used to gather information from the participants. Data was transcribed and subsequently subjected to an open coding system. The themes that emerged were analysed using thematic analysis. In chapter four of this dissertation, the researcher will endeavour to present the data and also discuss the findings.

## Chapter four

### Data presentation and discussion of the findings

#### 4.1 Introduction

In chapter three of this dissertation, the researcher discussed the research methodology and design adopted for the study. However, this chapter focuses on the data presentation and discussion of the findings. As earlier stated in chapter three of this dissertation, it is pertinent to reiterate that a thematic analysis approach is adopted. Here, the researcher has to emphasise that the literature review and theoretical framework used in chapter two of this study will be heavily relied upon to discuss the findings.

#### 4.2 Research question one: What are the potential conflict areas in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd?

Based on research question one, the following themes emerged: breach of contractual agreements, inadequate or poor communication between employer and employees, goal differences among workers, lack of cooperation among workers, increment of salary and other incentives, and inadequate resources. These themes are presented and discussed below.

##### 4.2.1 Breach of contractual agreements

It is pertinent to say that all the participants interviewed were unanimous in saying that most of the conflicts that happened in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd were as a result of the breach of contractual agreement. Patrick reported that most of the organisational conflicts experienced were as a result of workers not abiding by the agreement they had with the company. He stressed that once a worker is employed he/she will not abide by the terms and conditions of the employment. Patrick declared:

*I must tell you the truth that most workers in this company hardly abide by the terms and conditions of the employment. For instance, most of them absent themselves from work without reasonable excuses. When you query why they did not come to work, they run to the union (Interview with Patrick, July, 2016).*

Notwithstanding the view of Patrick on this point, Nadioo said that the South African Employment Act specifically outlined the terms and conditions by which the employer and

employees need to abide, but most times while the employer abides by terms and conditions, the employees on the other hand will ensure that these terms and conditions are either outrightly breached or bent to suit their missions.

In another development, Ntokozo clearly put the breach of contractual agreement at the door of the employer. He said that their employer regarded them as ‘tissue paper’ which is used and discarded. He mentioned that when their employer employed them, he (employer) promised all the incentives, but when they demanded for the fulfilment of those promises, it became a big issue. Ntokozo went on to say that very often the employer does not fulfil the agreement he entered into with the employees and this always leads to organisational conflict.

In the same vein, Makhanya, Londiwe and Mpume were very blunt when the researcher requested their views on the breach of contractual agreement. Makhanya reported:

*I cannot remember how many times our employer breached the agreement he entered with us. Look at the issue of increment in our salaries, we agreed that 12% should be added to our salaries once in every four years, but this is the sixth year nothing is done in this direction (Interview with Makhanya, July, 2016).*

Additionally, Mpume said that none of the agreements entered into with her employer have been fulfilled. Mpume mentioned that when she was about to be employed, her employer promised that she would be entitled to certain welfare schemes such as medical aid, a housing allowance and transport allowance, but years after her employment she had not benefited from any of the welfare schemes promised by her employer.

In the same development, Mhlongo said:

*We are tired with the way our employer is breaching the contractual agreement reached with her. Apart from paying our monthly salaries, all other agreements reached with her have been ‘violently’ breached. For instance, the issue of a medical scheme which they promised us is yet to be fulfilled (Interview with Mhlongo, July, 2016).*

From the narratives given above, it was indicated that one of the main causes of the conflict in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd is breach of contractual agreement by either the employees or employer. From the interpretivist perspective, the researcher is of the view that the breach of contractual agreement by the parties involved generated bad blood which in the long run leads to lack of trust between the parties in the organisation. In this dissertation, the literature

is silent on the breach of contractual agreement as the potential conflict area in the organisation, therefore the finding serves as a new knowledge in the field of leadership and management.

#### **4.2.2 Inadequate or poor communication between employer and employees**

From the data analysed, it was discovered that poor communication between the employer and employees was the cause of organisational conflict. Johann explained that his employer committed a managerial blunder by not giving them enough information about the organisational activities. He observed that most of the time the managers deliberately hid information from them hence creating room for speculation. Johann reported:

*Let me tell you, one of the causes of conflict in this company is poor information dissemination. People on the top (manager, researcher's word) do not provide us with adequate information about the company. We live on rumours and speculations (Interview with Johann, July, 2016).*

On the same point, Mary explained to the researcher that in spite of working in the organisation, she is living in darkness. She maintained that she does not know what is happening in the company because the top hierarchy of the organisation does not allow information to go around. Mary maintained:

*Personally, I am not aware of what is going on in this company because information is limited to some top management staff. They only provided us with what they think we should know, and that is not good for this organisation (Interview with Mary, July, 2016).*

Despite the position held by middle and casual workers on the poor communication as the cause of organisational conflict notwithstanding, the researcher probed further by asking the managers to state their mind on the matter. This is what Angela said:

*Well, it is not right for the organisation to make available all the information to all the staff in this organisation. My reason is that there is sensitive information which is only for the consumption of the management staff (Interview with Angela, July, 2016).*

In addition, Patrick reported thus:

*This company deals with all range of issues. Therefore, it would be a risk for the management to put all issues concerning the company at the doorstep of all staff. However, we are open to our staff on a number of issues (Interview with Patrick, July, 2016).*

Patrick's position was not quite different from that of Naidoo. He (Naidoo) was very blunt on the issue of lack of communication within the company. He said:

*This company cannot give sensitive materials or information to all the staff, no right company does that and we will not do it. We deal with finance, therefore, we have to keep our sources of finance secret (Interview with Naidoo, July, 2016).*

From the analysis it was revealed that poor communication is one of the main causes of organisational conflict. Although the managers of Automouldam agreed that there had been some level of restriction of information to some staff, they justified this position by saying that important information such as finance should never be made available to all the staff. From all indications, this finding is in agreement with Tidström's (2009) position that the source of organisational conflict lies in communication between different levels of an organisation which provides the means to identify differences, to develop a better understanding, and to seek accommodation within a mutually acceptable solution.

#### **4.2.3 Goal differences among workers**

Another important cause of conflict in Automouldam was different goals being pursued by individual workers in the company. It was observed that most workers in the company refused to follow the company's goal. For instance, Patrick reported that many of his workers refused to follow the company's goals; instead they preferred to abide by their own, which invariably affects the overall productivity of the company. Patrick cited many instances where workers abandoned the organisational goals. Patrick declared:

*I cannot explain to you how many times my workers abandoned the company's policy and goals. For instance, one of the casual workers always loitered around the factory, he was reprimanded and this caused conflict in that section of the company (Interview with Patrick, July, 2016).*

This assertion was further echoed by Angela when she reported:

*Let me tell you that some workers are problematic, they do not work and they do not allow other workers to perform their duties. You can imagine a worker refusing to carry out his/her official responsibilities, instead, delegating the duties to his/her colleague (Interview with Angela, July, 2016).*

In furtherance to the above, Ntokozo told the researcher that actually some workers are in the habit of pursuing their individual agenda instead of the collective goal of the organisation. When probed further why some workers engage in such unethical practice, Ntokozo replied “*we are different individuals from different environments, therefore we cannot all behave the same.*”

From the analysis, it was discovered that some company workers abandoned the official goal set by the company. From the interpretivist perspective, these workers engaged in individual goals because it could be they are not comfortable with the organisational climate of the company or the duties assigned to them are not challenging enough. However, this finding is supported by Rahim (2011) who argued that the possibility of conflict increases considerably when some sections in the organisation have different or incompatible goals.

#### **4.2.4 Lack of cooperation among workers**

Lack of cooperation among workers was cited as one of the potential areas of conflict in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd. Mpume narrated that hatred and selfishness is tearing the company apart. She recalled how she was looked down on by other workers because of her gender in the department in which she is working. Mpume declared:

*There is no cooperation among workers in this company. Everyone is on his/her own. It is only during times of conflict when people come together. As a result of this lack of cooperation, the management capitalise on this division and divide us further (Interview with Mpume, July, 2016).*

In probing further regarding lack of cooperation among workers in Automouldam, Mhlongo narrated:

*Everyone in this company faces his/her own future, nobody cares about his/her colleague. There is division especially among the junior workers. If someone is absent from work*



*because of ill-health, the worker involved has to face his/her problem (Interview with Mhlongo, July, 2016).*

In a similar vein, the researcher went for the opinion of the top managers of the company on the issue of lack of cooperation among staff in the company. In the words of the managing director (Patrick), he denied the fact that there is no cooperation among staff in his company. Patrick said:

*I always move around all the departments in the company, I have not noticed disunity among the staff. In fact, there is a high level of cohesion, harmony and unity among my workers (Interview with Patrick, July, 2016).*

Naidoo was very categorical with his words when he said that there is a high level of cooperation among workers. Naidoo declared:

*There exists a high degree of cooperation among workers in this company, there is no worry among us. We work and even drink together (Interview with Naidoo, July, 2016).*

From the above narrative, it is clear that lack of cooperation among workers is one of the causes of conflict in the company. From the interpretive perspective, though the managers denied that there is lack of cooperation among workers, they might have said that to portray the company in a good light. Additionally, from the observation of the researcher during data generation, it was very clear that there is some level of distrust among workers because the body language of some workers was suspicious, therefore, suggesting that there is no cooperation. It is worthy to say that the finding is at variance with the position held by Jehn and Bendersky (2003) who reported that conflict assists in improving a relationship among workers, because when two sides work on resolving a disagreement together, they feel that they have mutually accomplished their missions.

#### **4.2.5 Increment in salary and other incentives**

From the data analysis, it was revealed that increment in salary and other incentives have been mentioned as one of the potential conflict areas in Automouldam. Johann reported that increment in staff salaries is the main issue between the employer and employees. He said that the management of the company failed to honour the agreement they reached with the staff for the salary increment once in three years. This breach of agreement was not accepted by the staff hence they usually embarked on protests to demand for their rights.

This opinion was further stated by Mary who reported that in spite of the fact that they are being paid regularly, it is worrisome because some workers have remained on a particular salary scale since the first day he/she started working for the company. Mary declared:

*It is sad that most of us have remained in the salary scale from the first day of our resumption in this company. There is no salary increment or other incentive to motivate us to put in our best for the company (Interview with Mary, July, 2016).*

In a similar circumstance, Londiwe said:

*I have been receiving the same salary since I was employed for this job, there is no additional cent for me. During Christmas period, the workers are still paid the same salary, no incentive of any kind (Interview with Londiwe, July, 2016).*

In another development, Patrick reported that although the management of the company did not give a blanket increment for staff salaries, it ensured that hard working staff were rewarded on a regular basis. Patrick declared:

*This company is not a charitable organisation, we are in business to make profits. Therefore, we will not be increasing salaries for everyone without the corresponding increase in the staff output (Interview with Patrick, July, 2016).*

In probing further whether the hard working staff were rewarded, Patrick stated:

*The company rewarded hard working staff handsomely. However, we refuse to be blackmailed into awarding monies to staff who are putting in their best for the progress of the company (Interview with Patrick, July, 2016).*

It is pertinent to say that the views of Naidoo and Angela were not different from the one earlier expressed by Patrick. Naidoo and Angela unanimously agreed that the company do give incentives to hard working staff. However, they frown at the situation where workers expect the management to give them freely. Naidoo stated:

*The management is not Father Christmas, we cannot give money to every worker. But the company rewards staff with the undisputable efforts to the company. Recently, the management rewarded a hard working staff member with a car (Interview with Naidoo, July, 2016).*

The above finding indicated that lack of adequate incentives and increment in salary was the cause of conflict in the company. However, the top management were of the view that they often rewarded hard workers with some incentives, but they said that the company cannot increase salaries of workers indiscriminately because they are in business to make profits. This finding is in support of the position held by Tustin and Geldenhuys (2003) who earlier argued that poor incentives and irregular salary increment were the causes of 75% of organisational conflicts in China.

#### **4.2.6 Inadequate resources**

The analysis of the data indicated that inadequate resources were one of the main causes of the organisational conflict in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd. All the participants interviewed responded that scarcity of different kinds of resources often resulted in the conflict in the company.

Ntokozo was very categorical on the scarcity of resources in the company. He cited a situation where two workers were forced to do the work which was meant for six people. Ntokozo responded:

*There are shortages of staff in this company, the management does not intend to employ in the near future. The jobs meant for six people were often assigned to one person. We are forced to work for more than the salaries they have paid us (Interview with Ntokozo, July, 2016).*

Makhanya also reported that aside from the limited human resources experienced in the company, the issue of scarcity of office spaces was another problem in the company. He contended that in the company there are about four workers in a small room. This creates a serious problem and also reduced work efficiency among workers because the room is not spacious enough to accommodate them.

In addition, Mary said that she was asked to share a table with about two other workers in the company. She maintained that this arrangement is not comfortable not only for her but everyone in the office.

Patrick acknowledged the fact that there are insufficient resources in the company, but he particularly mentioned staff offices as the main challenge in the company. Patrick responded:

*Yes, the issue of office space is a big problem in the company. Most of the offices were converted to a warehouse. However, the management will resolve the challenge (Interview with Patrick, July, 2016).*

Naidoo added:

*The management realised that office spaces is a major issue in the company, but we will soon address this challenge. We have told the workers to be patient with the management (Interview with Naidoo, July, 2016).*

From the analysis, it was observed that the issue of inadequate resources has been identified as a potential conflict area in the company. Although one of the junior staff interviewed mentioned that there are shortages of staff in the company, he maintained that a worker was compelled to do the job meant for six people. However, this view by Ntokozo was not refuted or accepted by any of the managers at the company. From the interpretive perspective, the managers were silent in this area because they did not want to over-staff the company to avoid redundancy and wastage. This finding is in support of the position canvassed by Rahim (2011), that in a situation where the resources are scarce in an organisation, there is a possibility that the scarcity of these resources can lead to conflict situations.

#### **4.3 Research question two: What are the effects of organisational conflict in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd?**

From the analysis, it was revealed that the effects of organisational conflict in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd are more destructive rather than constructive, as asserted by Jehn and Bendersky (2003). All the participants interviewed responded that low productivity, wastage of time, absenteeism, disharmony, psychological trauma/stress and low incomes at the company are some of the effects of conflict at Automouldam.

##### **4.3.1 Low productivity**

Patrick identified low productivity as the main effect of conflict in Automouldam. He reported that the company's production during the time of conflict is usually very low. He said that during this period the entire company is usually closed and the workers in some instances destroyed company property.

Patrick declared:

*The effects of conflict in this company are enormous. During this period the productivity is at its lowest point. The company completely stops its production and the goods produced before the commencement of the industrial conflict are sold (Interview with Patrick, July, 2016).*

In furtherance to the above assertion, Naidoo reported the company productivity is at its lowest point during the conflict in the company. He said:

*The company does not break even during the conflict period. Worst still some workers may embark on the destruction of the goods. Aside from the destruction of the goods produced, the workers also vandalised some office equipment (Interview with Naidoo, July, 2016).*

Ntokozo did concur with the views expressed by Patrick and Naidoo on the low productivity experienced by the company during the industrial unrest. He maintained that the workers in the company always shut down all the departments during this period. According to Ntokozo, the departments often affected by the unrest were procurement, production and marketing. These departments could be regarded as very important because they generate income for the company.

In addition, Mhlongo reported that the company's daily outputs dropped to unimaginable levels during the period the company embarked on industrial action. Mhlongo said:

*The daily production during the period of industrial action has dropped to zero percent. Goods produced before the unrest was allowed to be taken to the market. There is a complete shut down of the company which invariably results in a loss of income (Interview with Mhlongo, July, 2016).*

From the findings, it was indicated that the company experienced low productivity during the period of conflict. The low productivity was as a result of a protest carried out by the workers. The shut down of the company apart from resulting in low productivity also negatively impacts the company's income. From all indications, the low productivity experienced resulted in a poor yearly turnover experienced in recent times. The findings affirmed Floyd and Lane's (2000) position that conflict in an organisation resulted in low productivity. In addition to the above assertion, Lovelace, Shapiro and Weingart (2009) argued that the poor outputs experienced in automobile industries in Poland between 1991 and 2003 were as a result of the conflict in the sector.

#### 4.3.2 Waste of time

During conflict periods in Automouldam, it was revealed that time wasting was one of the major effects. Patrick reported that time wasting happened in different areas. For instance, he mentioned time wasting during negotiation with the unionist. Patrick said:

*It is unfortunate to mention that during conflict periods in this company, a lot of time is wasted in negotiation. We have to negotiate with the workers' union for possible resolution. The period during the negotiation may last for three days (Interview with Patrick, July, 2016).*

Naidoo affirmed the position expressed by Patrick when he observed that during the negotiation, the top management staff spent hours around the negotiation table. He recalled that most times the workers' union deliberately frustrated the efforts of the management in resolving the conflict by avoiding meeting or demanding the impossible.

In a similar development, when this issue of time wasting was raised with Johann, he replied that the company lost precious time deliberating on how to resolve the conflict instead of looking for ways of how to turn around the fortune of the company around.

Mary's view on the issue of wasting time during conflict in the company was different from other participants; she maintained that though valuable time is often wasted during times of conflict, the right thing has to be done. When the researcher probed further to find out what she meant by the 'right thing,' Mary said: *"the right thing means the company fulfilling the demands of the workers."* She went further to say that the company is in the habit of ignoring and denying the workers of their legitimate demands.

From the narrative, it is clear that during the conflict period a lot of valuable time is wasted. From the interpretivist point of view, the time wasted during the conflict period impacts negatively on the fortune of the company. In economic terms, the company would have lost a colossal sum of money. In the literature, the issue of time wasting was not identified as an effect of organisational conflict. Scholars and researchers might have regarded time wasting during the organisational conflict as a 'insignificant' hence it was discarded. It is pertinent to say that although the issue of time wasting seems 'insignificant', it is one of the negative effects that face the company. In light of the above, this finding serves as new knowledge in the area of conflict management.

### 4.3.3 Absenteeism

Another theme that emerged from the second research question was the issue of absenteeism. All the participants unanimously agreed that absenteeism is one of the effects of organisational conflict in the Automouldam (Pty) Ltd. Patrick reported in the time of conflict in the company that he personally absents himself from the office. He maintained that he did this in order to avoid being harassed by the workers.

In addition to Patrick's view, Angela said that absenteeism during conflict periods in the company is often pronounced. All the workers in the organisation were forced to stay at home. She added that few other workers who reported to the office did that to enforce compliance to the strike.

In a similar vein, Mary and Ntokozo said that they were forced to stay at home during conflict in the company. Ntokozo specifically said:

*We are always forced to stay at home in the time of a strike. If any of the workers attempt to break or ignore the 'stay-at-home' order by the workers' union, he/she may be punished. Therefore, all workers were forced to stay away from the office during this period (Interview with Ntokozo, July, 2016).*

One of the participants who is a security personnel (Mhlongo) reported that in the time of conflict, he and other security personnel were the only people who reported to work. Mhlongo said:

*During conflict periods in the organisation, every worker is forced to stay in his or her house, the only exception are the people in the security department, who reported to work in order to protect the company's property from vandals (Interview with Mhlongo, July, 2016).*

Data analysis revealed that workers stayed at home during industrial action at Automouldam. From all indications, it was obvious that managers were compelled to stay at home for fear of being beaten by the workers. It is very common to see that in South Africa managers are always threatened anytime there is a protest in the company. In fact, in some instances they (managers) are shot at with a gun, therefore, for their own safety they are forced to stay away from work. Findings also indicated that security personnel did not absent themselves from work because of the sensitive nature of the department. The security people were on duty because of the company property which has to be safeguarded from the thieves and vandals.

This finding, no doubt, is supported by Jensen-Campbell Lauri and Graziano (2005) who argued that conflict in the organisation is a major stressor and a leading cause of absenteeism and late coming.

#### **4.3.4 Disharmony and hatred in the organisation**

From the data analysis, it was discovered that during the conflict in the company there is a high degree of disharmony and hatred among the staff. Angela reported that disharmony and hatred always occurred between the top management staff and junior workers. She went further to say that most times the disharmony and hatred could be so severe that dangerous weapons were used to inflict injuries and pain on some of the managers.

In addition, Naidoo, Angela and Patrick were of the view that disharmony and hatred which existed during conflict periods at the company was often severe. Patrick specifically said:

*Let me inform you that the disharmony and hatred in the company during the conflict period was unimaginable. Some junior workers who have been harbouring hatred against some of us eventually vent their anger during conflict time (Interview with Patrick, July, 2016).*

It will be observed that the views expressed by Patrick and Angela were not in any way different from Londiwe's opinion. Londiwe declared:

*Personally, I don't like some managers in this company because some have cheated and denied us our rights. You can imagine, one of the managers saying that the allowance which was usually paid be stopped, you cannot like such a human being if you are in my shoes (Interview with Londiwe, July, 2016).*

In a similar circumstance, Mpume observed that workers exhibited hatred towards each other not only during conflict periods. She mentioned a particular case where managers have to suspend workers who participated in the protest for better wages. Mpume reported:

*Look, some managers in this company have hatred against some workers they consider a 'threat' to the progress of the company. Those workers the management labelled as a threat are often denied certain benefits accrued to them and often faced different disciplinary committees (Interview with Mpume, July, 2016).*

From the findings, it was discovered that disharmony and hatred ran supreme in the company during conflict periods. Patrick, Angela and Naidoo particularly focused on the hatred and



disharmony exhibited by the junior workers to their superiors. They cited cases where some junior workers hid under the cover of organisational protests to vent their anger on the managers. In sharp contrast, the junior workers in the organisation (Automouldam) accused the management staff of exhibiting hatred towards them for participating in the industrial action. They (junior workers) said that the hatred was in the form of denial of different benefits, suspension, among others. This finding is at variance with a position by Jehn and Bendersky (2003) that conflict improves the relationship between workers because when two parties work towards resolving a disagreement together, they feel that they have mutually accomplished their missions.

#### **4.3.5 Psychological trauma and stress**

It was explained that psychological trauma and stress disorder were the aftermaths of conflict at Automouldam (Pty) Ltd. Patrick explained that during the period of the organisational conflict in his company, he did not sleep soundly at night during the time the conflict lasted. Patrick declared:

*I suffered from insomnia during the workers' protest in my company. I spent hours thinking of how to resolve the crisis in the company at night. And in the day time, I spent hours at the negotiating table with the striking staff looking for a resolution (Interview with Patrick, July, 2016).*

Additionally, Naidoo said that apart from the stress he went through during this period in the company, he reported that the fear of being attacked by the striking workers with various weapons was something else he was afraid of. Naidoo said that some workers went around looking for their managers to beat up because they had some hidden agenda against some of them. He said this was very frightening.

In a similar development, Londiwe and Ntokozo said that they were unable to think straight during the period of conflict because of the state of uncertainty in the company. Londiwe reported that the general atmosphere in the company was often unpredictable. This, according to her, resulted in the psychological trauma and stress disorder she went through during the conflict time in the organisation.

From the analysis, the researcher found that the participants suffered from psychological trauma and stress disorders as a result of conflict in the company. These ailments led to most

of the workers spending valuable working hours in the hospital which in turn resulted in loss of human capital. Apart from the loss in human capital, the issue of low productivity was also experienced. From the general system theory adopted for the study, it is obvious that the malfunctioning of one component of the company, that is, workers suffering from ill-health, led to the dysfunction of high productivity in the company. Additionally, Omisore and Abiodun (2014) argued that effect of conflict may result in the physiological response in the workers' bodies. This happened when more and more adrenalin is shot into the blood which increases the heart beat and blood pressure while more hydrochloric acid is secreted into the stomach, leading to illness such as peptic ulcers, respiratory problems like asthma, headaches, coronary problems and hypertension (Haar, 2004). Mowday, Porter and Steers (2013) contended that the psychological consequences of conflict in the organisation were deep trauma and diminished coping mechanisms.

#### **4.3.6 Low income**

The issue of low income accruing to the company was also mentioned by the participants. Angela and Naidoo were very blunt with their words when they said that the company recorded low sale of its products during the conflict. Angela specifically maintained that due to the strike, production of goods was stopped in the company. Moreover, the other services the company used to render to its clients were also stopped. From all indications, the stoppage of work resulted in a complete closure of the company which invariably led to low income generation.

Patrick also supported the view expressed by Angela and Naidoo on the issue of low income to the company during the conflict periods. Patrick said:

*Anytime there is conflict in the company, millions of rands are lost as a result of this. In an hour, the company usually made approximately R150 000. When one adds the total money lost in three days of a strike, it will be at a range of millions of rands (Interview with Patrick, July, 2016).*

In spite of the fact that junior workers agreed with the managers that the company recorded low income during the conflict time, they appeared unperturbed by it because according to the majority of them, it was what the company wanted. When the researcher probed further on the issue of 'what the company wanted,' Makhanya said:

*We do not care whether the company is making profits or not, what we are after is the management to give us our rights (Interview with Makhanya, July, 2016).*

Additionally, Mary resorted:

*It is unfortunate that the company lost a great amount of money during this period, but the workers could not spoil their blood in order to make the company function. After all, it is the issue of 'I rub your back and you rub mine' (Interview with Mary, July, 2016).*

From the narrative, it was indicated that the company recorded low income during conflict. The poor income generation was a result of the stoppage of work by the workers. It was observed that because of the closure of the company to the customers, the goods which hitherto were taken to the market were left in the warehouse. This invariably resulted in the loss of income and the accommodation of debt by the company.

**4.4 Research question three:** What are the ways in which managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in the company?

All the participants interviewed identified six ways in which managers develop conflict management strategies for the optimisation of organisational efficiency at Automouldam. From the participants' perspective, the six ways mentioned were as follows: establishing a good working relationship with workers, provision of adequate channels of communication, provision of a good working environment, provision of incentives, negotiation with workers on issues bothering them and fulfilment of agreements reached with workers. These six ways are explained below.

#### **4.4.1 Establishing a good working relationship with workers**

From the analysis, it was discovered that for the achievement of optimal organisational efficiency at Automouldam, a good working relationship among workers at the company has to be established. The participants agreed that the managers, supervisors and the casual workers at the company have to liaise with one another for the progress of the company. They maintained that workers at the company should treat each other with respect and avoid unnecessary favouritism.

Ntokozo highlighted a scenario where he was unduly transferred to another department in the company because a particular manager wanted to replace him with someone who shared the same racial group. Ntokozo went further to say although he accepted the transfer as a routine movement of workers within the company, he knew that it was purely based on favouritism and ethnicity. He questioned why he was ill-treated by his manager and submitted that this kind of discrimination in the office should be discouraged in order to avoid organisational conflict.

The view of Mhlongo was not entirely different from the one Ntokozo expressed. Mhlongo explained that the company could only experience high organisational efficiency and productivity when every worker, irrespective of the position he/she is occupying, respected one another and maintained a good working relationship with each other. He questioned why managers and other senior staff, instead of establishing and maintaining high level of friendliness with the junior staff, resorted to bullying and verbal threats which seemed to retard the progress of the organisation.

The views of Ntokozo and Mhlongo notwithstanding, the managing director (Patrick) said that he had no doubt that for organisational efficiency and high level of productivity to be achieved there must be a good working relationship among workers in the company. He maintained that in an environment where there is rancour and hatred among workers, it will invariably affect the entire organisation.

In addition to Patrick's views, Naidoo stated:

*In this company, there exists amiable working relationships among workers. Though there are pockets of misunderstanding here and there, however, that did not affect the cordial relationship among staff. We resolve each grey area as it arises in the company (Interview with Naidoo, July, 2016).*

From the narration, it can be deduced that establishing and maintaining a good working relationship among workers was the solution for having stability and productivity in the company. However, some of the participants interviewed called for the eradication of all forms of favouritism and ethnicity in the company. They went on to say that respect should be accorded to the managers, while the managers should also reciprocate the respect to their subordinates. In the literature, it was not established that a good working relationship among

workers was one of the solutions that the management should develop in the management and resolution of organisational conflict. Based on the above, the findings serve as new knowledge.

#### **4.4.2 Provision of adequate channels of communication**

Another theme which emerged from the third research question was the provision of adequate channels of communication. In fact, all the participants interviewed reported that to ensure that there is optimal organisational efficiency at Automouldam, the management should provide adequate channels of communication. Mary submitted that it is extremely dangerous to work in an environment where there is no proper and adequate flow of information. She maintained that the flow of information within the company should be from two angles, which is both from the top management to casual workers and from the casual workers to the top management. Mary angrily rejected a situation where the managers only give directives to junior workers, but expect valid and on-the-spot information from the junior workers on the activities of the company.

In addition, Johann said that since he joined the company he had observed that the management were in the habit of restricting information available to workers. He, therefore, cited areas in which there is an absolute dearth of information. For instance, he mentioned lack of definite criteria used for the promotion of workers as one of areas in which there is no information. He said that it is annoying to see that one of the colleagues in the office was promoted and one begins to wonder what the basis was for his or her promotion. He concluded that this situation is not healthy for the company and that it creates tension and unnecessary rivalry among workers.

In a similar development, Patrick was categorical with his support for provision of adequate channels of communication and he declared:

*I totally agree with the issue of the provision of adequate channels of communication in the company, this is because it will create oneness among workers and douse unnecessary tension (Interview with Patrick, July, 2016).*

When the researcher asked him (Patrick) as the managing director whether he has adhered to the provision of adequate channels of communication and information dissemination in the company, Patrick replied:

*The principle of information dissemination is strictly adhered to in this company. We make sure that all information is circulated either through the company's newsletter or billboard (Interview with Patrick, July, 2016).*

From the narration, it was observed that the provision of adequate channels of communication at Automouldam has been established as the channel for achieving organisational efficiency. However, from the quotes it was mentioned that apart from the newsletter, information meant for the workers was also disseminated through the company's billboard. However, it appeared that in spite of the fact that a newsletter and billboard were used as avenues for the dissemination of information, the casual workers who could not read the said newsletter or information on the billboard were left out. This might have been the reason why casual workers in the company said that information was not circulated.

#### **4.4.3 Provision of a good working environment**

The issue of the provision of a good working environment in the company was also raised by the participants. Makhanya said that for any company to function effectively and efficiently, the management should ensure that the workers are provided with a good working environment. From Makhanya's perspective, a good working environment includes: good office space, medical, transport and housing allowance, availability of resources and regular training. Based on the identification and explanation of what Makhanya referred to as a good working environment, he submitted that he cannot confidently say that the management of Automouldam has provided a good working environment for workers. At the end, Makhanya calls for the provision of a good working environment for the staff to avoid industrial conflict.

From all indications, Angela also made a case for the provision of a good working environment for the workers in the company. She cited the issue of re-training of staff in the company as the priority of the management. She declared:

*On the issue of the provision of a good working environment, the management has done creditably well. We have always sent our staff to re-fresher courses. From the official record in my possession, six key staff have been sent to Germany for training (Interview with Angela, July, 2016).*

In addition, Londiwe and Mary supported the views expressed by Angela that some staff were sent to Germany for training by the management of the company. They highlighted that management had done well in this area. They added that aside from the foreign training which some staff were exposed to, other workers attended a series of workshops organised to keep them abreast of the contemporary issues in the automobile world.

Ntokozo was of the view that the intention of the management to send staff on re-fresher courses and workshops was for their selfish reasons and interest. Ntokozo maintained that the management sent workers to those workshops and training in order to ensure that new innovations were introduced in the company which would enhance high productivity. In addition to the re-fresher courses and workshops, Ntokozo said that the management should also look into the provision of transport allowances for workers to ease their movement to and from work.

Patrick agreed totally with the notion of the provision of a good working environment. He said that as the managing director of the company, he always ensured that the best was provided for the workers. Furthermore, Patrick told the researcher that the management has agreed to acquire a 62 seater bus to transport workers to and from the office. He concluded that in future, the issue of coming to the office late or absenting oneself from work on the pretext that the person does not have transport fare, will be a thing of the past.

From the narration, it was discovered that a good working environment is one of the panaceas for a effective conflict management strategy in Automouldam. According to the participants, overseas training and numerous workshops were organised to update the workers on the new techniques used in the handling of machines. However, some workers said that a good working environment should not just stop at re-training of workers, they said that the company should as a matter of urgency introduce welfare packages like a good transport system to convey workers to and from work, a housing allowance, a medical allowance, among others. From all indications, the demands of these workers is based on Maslow's theory of needs which emphasises the physical requirements for human survival.

The issue of a good working environment was not mentioned in the literature as a good strategy in managing conflict in the organisation. However, the issue of accommodating one's needs to avoid conflict was mentioned by Thomas and Kilmann (1976). Therefore, the finding is in support of the earlier position held by Thomas and Kilmann (1976).

#### 4.4.4 Provision of incentives

The provision of incentives was also mentioned as one of the ways in which the managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in Automouldam. However, the researcher probed further what the participants meant by the 'provision of incentives' because they had also mentioned a 'good working environment' which appears to be one and the same thing. In response, Naidoo said that provision of incentives for him connotes those entitlements which are due to workers in order to motivate them to put more effort into their work. Naidoo mentioned those incentives provided for the workers to include: overtime allowance, Christmas gifts, annual salary increment and accident insurance. Naidoo added that in terms of accident insurance for the workers, he said that the company spent millions of rands yearly to ensure that workers are covered with the insurance.

In her response to the issue of the provision of incentives, Mary said that the company has tried in this regard. She particularly mentioned Christmas gifts which the company gives yearly as one of the incentives she appreciates more. Mary responded:

*Seriously, the company has done well in the area of the provision of gifts to workers during the Christmas period. You know that families spend so much to buy food during this period, the company assisted us in the area of provision of rice, meat, vegetable oil, and biscuits (Interview with Mary, July, 2016).*

In a similar development, Mhlongo said that he really appreciated the incentives put in place by the company to ensure workers are happy. He specifically mentioned the accident insurance as one of the incentives he appreciated the most. When the researcher probed further on the reason he appeared to appreciate the accident insurance more than other incentives provided by the company, he said:

*Some of us in the security department, we are exposed to danger in the course of carrying out our official duty. For instance, we can be attacked by the thieves, therefore, the insurance will assist us in settling the hospital bills or in case of permanent disability, we will be compensated (Interview with Mhlongo, July, 2016).*

Additionally, Patrick said that the management is conscious and appreciative of the workers' efforts in the company. He said that since the company had been generating profits in recent times, it would be a disservice to the workers to deny them of their rights. He said that the



company spent over R3 million annually to provide for workers' welfare. He maintained that in the 2017 financial year, the company will commit more funds to the welfare of workers. He cited the areas such as the acquisition of a 62 seater bus to transport workers to and from work and the provision of car to the best worker in the company, as areas which the management will focus on. The researcher asked Patrick why he budgeted such a huge amount of money for the workers' welfare instead of plying it back into the company. Patrick responded:

*The management wants her workers to be happy because it is only in an environment where the workers are happy that they will be able and willing to put in their best for the company. Moreover, industrial conflict will be reduced when workers are well taken care of (Interview with Patrick, July, 2016).*

From the above quotations, it was established that the provision of incentives is one of the conflict managing strategies that the managers adopted in avoiding conflict in the company. It was discovered that millions of rands had been spent to ensure that workers were well catered for. According to Patrick, who is the managing director of the company, he assured the workers that more funds would be injected into the welfare scheme for the workers. From the interpretive perspective, the injection of more funds into the workers' welfare scheme will ultimately result in high productivity from the workers, which eventually leads to a high turnover in the company.

#### **4.4.5 Negotiation with workers on issues bothering them**

The manner in which the management of the company negotiates with the workers on the issues bothering them was also raised by the participants. Some participants were of the view that it was during the period of conflict that the management of the company calls them for negotiation on the matters that affect them. Johannann said that it is totally unacceptable for the management of this company to take some unilateral decisions affecting the workers without proper consultation and negotiation with the workers. He cited some examples in which decisions were taken without the workers' input:

*Look at the issue of the maternity leave for female employees in the company, the South African Labour Act specifically states that a female employee is entitled to at least four*

*consecutive months of maternity leave with full salary. But the management wanted to reduce it to three months (Interview with Johann, July, 2016).*

He said that if the management wanted to take this unpopular and unacceptable decision, they ought to have first and foremost negotiated with workers before they dabbled into the issue of the implementation of it.

The researcher wanted to ascertain the level of truth in the view being expressed by Johann, and asked Mary her opinion on the matter. Mary responded:

*The management of the company attempted to violate the Basic Conditions of Employment Act of South Africa, it was violently resisted because of lack of consultation and negotiation with the workers (Interview with Mary, July, 2016).*

In another development, Patrick said that the issue of negotiation on the matters which affect the workers is very important. He maintained that from his experience, he has known that no tangible thing could be achieved in an atmosphere of coercion and arbitrariness. He argued that a stable and friendly industrial climate could only be achieved through negotiation with the workers. When the researcher asked Patrick to explain ways he navigated the negotiation with his workers to resolving conflict in the company, Patrick responded thus:

*Most of the decisions we took affecting our workers were through negotiation with them. We ensure that their views are not only heard, but are used as input for the implementation of the programme or scheme (Interview with Patrick, July, 2016).*

Naidoo added that the opinions of the workers were usually sought on any issue affecting them. However, where the management took decisions unilaterally without the workers' input, the management ensured that the issue is negotiated with the workers to avert the possible conflict.

The above quotations indicated that to negotiate with the workers on the matters affecting them was one of the ways the management adopted to avert industrial conflict in the company. Though some junior workers held that the management didn't consult them in every case, they cited the case of maternity leave which the management decided to reduce from four to three months. The junior workers and some managers agreed that this issue was resolved through negotiation. This finding is in agreement with the position held by Oetzel

and Ting-Toomey (2003) that negotiation is important among workers to reduce the chances of disputes and conflicts.

#### **4.4.6 Fulfilment of agreements reached with workers**

Another theme that came out strongly from the open coding used was the issue of the fulfilment of agreements with the two parties (employer and employees). The participants reported that most of the conflicts that happened in the company were as a result of the refusal of the parties to abide by and fulfil the agreements reached with one another. In order to have a conflict free environment in the company, Londiwe advised that the management has to ensure that any agreement they entered into with workers has to be fulfilled. He applauded the management in fulfilling the agreement reached with the workers on the payment of overtime allowance.

In a similar vein, Mpume was of the view that the fulfilment of agreements should not only be on the side of the employer, rather the employees should also ensure that they fulfil the agreement they enter into with the employer. Mpume maintained that it is unacceptable and unprofessional for workers to come to work late and at the same time for the people to leave the office before official closing time. Mpume concluded that such behaviour by workers is likely to create conflict with the management.

The views expressed by Mpume notwithstanding, Angela said that the fulfilment of agreements reached with the workers is one of the top priorities of the management of the company. Angela resorted:

*The management honoured all the agreements reached with her workers. We are aware that any unfulfilled agreement with the workers can result in distrust and discord between the employer and employees (Interview with Angela, July, 2016).*

In support of Angela's view, Patrick said that the company does not toy with the agreements it enters into with workers. He therefore said that the company respected and fulfilled all the agreements with the workers whether it was written or not. However, he decried a situation where the company is fulfilling all her obligations to the workers, but the workers are reciprocating by exhibiting unprofessional conduct in the company. Patrick cited some of the unprofessional conducts to include: lateness to work, laziness, stealing, among others. He

concluded by saying that the company will continue to fulfil all the agreements it entered into with the employees and he also expected the same treatment from workers.

From the narration, it was established that the fulfilment of agreements between employer and employees was one of the ways managers used in conflict management for optimal organisational efficiency in the company. From all indications, some participants interviewed actually said that the employees should not only expect the management of the company to fulfil the agreements reached with them, rather, the employees should also ensure that they honour and fulfil the agreements they reached with the company. In a related development, Patrick asserted that the management of the company will not fail to fulfil its obligations to respect all the agreements the company enters into with her workers, but he called for the workers to return the gesture to the company.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

In chapter four of this dissertation, guided by the research questions and interview schedules that were developed, the researcher presented and analysed the data, and the findings were subsequently discussed using the literature in chapter two of the study. Some of the key findings discovered were that potential causes of conflict in Automouldam were the breach of contractual agreements, inadequate or poor communication between employer and employees, goal differences among workers, lack of cooperation among workers, increment of salary and other incentives and inadequate resources. Furthermore, low productivity, time wastage, absenteeism, disharmony, psychological trauma/stress, and low income to the company were identified as the effects of conflict in the company. In a related development, ways in which managers develop conflict management strategies for the optimisation of organisational efficiency in the company were: establishing a good working relationship with workers, provision of adequate channels of communication, provision of a good working environment, provision of incentives, negotiation with workers on issues bothering them and fulfilment of agreements reached with workers.

In the next and final chapter, the researcher will focus the summary of the whole dissertation, and a conclusion and recommendations will be reached.

## **Chapter five**

### **Summary, recommendations and conclusion**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, the researcher presented the findings of the study. However, in chapter five of this study, efforts will be geared towards presenting the summary of the whole dissertation. Additionally, the key findings from the research will once again be highlighted, limitations of the study and areas of further research will be discussed, thereafter, the recommendations suggested and conclusion will be presented.

#### **5.2 Summary**

This study focused on the ways in which managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency at Automouldam (Pty) Ltd. The researcher began the introduction of the study by orientating the audience with the organisational structure of chapter one. Efforts were geared towards giving a vivid explanation of the background and statement of the problem. In refreshing our minds, the director's position on the state of affairs, the low morale of the workers and the general low productivity experienced in the company in recent times were some of the problems noticed which necessitated the research. The rationale and motivation of the study were two fold, that is, professional and academic. In the context of professional, the researcher reported that since he joined the company, there was relative stable industrial peace witnessed in the past years. The stable industrial climate experienced suddenly changed to the 'theatre of war' between the employer and employees which invariably affected the company. Furthermore, it was stated that a lot of scholarly works were conducted on conflict and conflict-related issues in South Africa and the world. From the literature, no research was conducted on the ways in which the managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency at Automouldam. Based on the above gaps, the researcher was compelled to dabble into the study.

The objectives of the study were stated as follows:

- d) To examine the potential conflict in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd.
- e) To examine the effects of organisational conflict in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd.

- f) To determine the ways in which managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in the company.

Guided by the three objectives, the researcher developed the three research questions used in the study.

- What are the potential conflict areas in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd?
- What are the effects of organisational conflict in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd?
- What are the ways in which managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in the company?

In any study conducted, there are potential beneficiaries. Therefore, the researcher stated that the study will be of great significance to the director, managers and workers of Automouldam (Pty) Ltd by highlighting potential areas of conflict and also identifying strategies in which this conflict can be resolved. It was equally stated that the recommendations will benefit other companies and industries in South Africa and in other countries around the world in creating fertile grounds for amicable relationships between employer and employees, hence boosting staff morale and team spirit in the company. Finally, aside from contributing to the existing body of knowledge in the field of business and leadership, the study will also act as a reference material for other researchers and scholars in business education.

Chapter two focused on the review of related literature. Efforts were geared towards explaining the conceptualisation of conflict, types of conflict, orientation to conflict, causes of conflict in the organisation, effects of conflict in the organisation, managing conflict strategies and managing conflict through communication. Additionally, the researcher talked about negotiation in conflict and the skills needed in negotiation. Finally, the researcher adopted the general system theory as a theoretical framework for the study.

In chapter three of this dissertation, the researcher discussed the research methodology adopted. To refresh the mind of the audience, unlike most research in the area of conflict where researchers adopted a quantitative approach, the researcher deviated substantially by adopting a qualitative approach in the study. As stated in chapter three of this dissertation, the adoption of a qualitative approach was informed by the nature of the study under investigation, which according to Maree (2011) is out to create an in-depth understanding of

the ways managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in the company.

In line with the qualitative approach adopted, it was also stated that an interpretive paradigm was used to really understand the phenomena under investigation. The target population of the study was stated as 126; it was explained by the researcher that a purposive sampling technique was adopted in selecting ten participants for the study. Aside from the position held by Palsy (2008) that a purposive sampling technique is synonymous with qualitative studies, the researcher adopted purposive sampling to select ten participants in order to interrogate in-depth ways in which the managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd.

It was reported that two research instruments were developed to generate data for the study. The first semi-interview schedule was called the Manager Interview Schedule (MIS) and it was designed for the managers. The second instrument was known as the Middle and Casual Interview Schedule (MCIS) and it was designed to elicit information from middle level and casual workers of the company. However, each of these interview schedules consisted of nine questions which border on the study under investigation. The researcher advanced the reason for the adoption of two data collection methods in the study that it was out to ensure the trustworthiness of the data and the validity of the research findings. Finally, it was explained that all ethical issues were considered before the researcher embarked on the collection of the data. The data generated was transcribed, subsequently subjected to open coding and the themes which emerged were analysed using thematic analysis.

In chapter four of the study, guided by the research questions and interview schedules developed, the researcher presented and discussed the data. The researcher wants to emphasise that the literature and theoretical framework used in chapter two of this study were heavily relied upon in analysing the data.

In chapter five of the dissertation, the summary, conclusion, limitations of the study, areas of further research and recommendations suggested are discussed.

### **5.3 Key research findings**

From the analysis, the following key findings were reached as the potential causes of conflict in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd. Breach of contractual agreement was discovered when one party

failed to respect and honour the agreement reached. The other party felt used and this resulted in the conflict. Additionally, it was found that poor or inadequate communication between employer and employees necessitated conflict in the company. The participants established that good communication especially between the manager and his/her subordinates reduced or eliminated conflict, because in an area where conflict arises it may easily be talked about before it gets out of hand.

Similarly, it was revealed that lack of cooperation among workers significantly resulted in organisational conflict because discord, lack of cohesion and disharmony among workers impact negatively on the company's turnover. From all indications, the resultant effect of the company's low turnover was retrenchment of the workforce because of inability of the company to pay monthly salaries. Increment of salary and provision of other incentives to the workers has been found to have caused conflict in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd. Participants agreed that they relied on monthly salaries for their livelihood, therefore, they need to be motivated by the employer through constant payment of salaries and provision of other incentives. In a situation where these incentives are delayed or outrightly denied it resulted in a serious confrontation with the management of the company.

Findings from the second research question indicated that low productivity was one of the effects of organisational conflict in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd. The participants agreed that when workers stayed away from work as a result of industrial action, production of goods did not only stop, but all other services provided by the company also stopped. The stoppage of work by the workers led to low productivity in the company.

Findings also showed that waste of valuable time was one of the effects on organisational conflict in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd . There is a popular Nigerian adage which says 'time is money,' therefore, the participants agreed that in a situation where the workers and management engaged in conflict instead of planning on how to increase the company's productivity was a total waste of time and energy. Furthermore, absenteeism, disharmony, psychological trauma/stress and low income to the company were also identified as the effects of conflict in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd .

Findings from the third research question revealed by the participants that establishment of a good working relationship with workers, provision of adequate channels of communication, provision of a good working environment, provision of incentives, negotiation with workers



on issues bothering them and fulfilment of agreements reached with workers were some of the ways in which managers develop conflict management strategies for the optimisation of organisational efficiency in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd.

#### **5.4 Limitations of the study**

In this study, there were series of limitations experienced in the course of conducting the research. Just like any other research, these limitations were surmountable by the researcher. Before the researcher looks into ways in which the challenges were surmounted, the limitations will first and foremost be identified.

This researcher wants to state that a serious limitation was experienced in the area of establishing and gaining access to the participants. In fact, the researcher wrote series of letters to the managing director (MD) of Automouldam seeking permission to conduct research in the company. Moreover, many telephone calls were made, but it is unfortunate to report that none of the telephone calls made was picked up. This researcher was forced to book an appointment with the human resources manager of the company. It was the human resources manager who in turn arranged an appointment with the MD after three months of fruitless exercise.

After the permission to conduct the interview was obtained from the MD, another letter was written to each of the participants for their willingness and availability to participate in the interviews. This process took a month to obtain consent to freely participate in the study. On the days of the interviews, because of the nature of work each of the participants engaged in, the time scheduled for the interview for each of the interviewees was strictly adhered to. The interviews were stressful because the interviewer was forced to conduct the interviews within three days with ten participants.

Another challenge experienced during the study was in the area of transcription and coding of the data. In line with qualitative study, the raw data from the field has to be transcribed and coded. It was unfortunate that the researcher did not use the popular software called Nvivo to transcribe, code and analyse the data, rather, it was done manually. This was very stressful and time consuming. However, it is pertinent to say that to engage with data manually was beneficial because it allowed the researcher to submerge himself in the data and understand the views of the participants on the organisational conflict in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd.

## **5.5 Areas of further research**

In the study, the researcher focused on ways in which the managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd. The findings from the study clearly indicated areas in which managers should focus on in managing conflict in the company. However, the findings equally created some salient questions which need to be answered. For instance, this researcher constantly questioned himself on the type of leadership styles adopted by the managers in managing the company because this may cause or eliminate conflict. Again, the issue of negotiation when conflict arises was equally mentioned as one of the findings. However, the finding was silent on the issue of calibre and behavioural patterns of people involved in the negotiation. This is because as Grossett and Venter (1998) argued, conflict may be easily and quickly resolved when people involved in the negotiation come to the negotiation table with the minds of resolving the dispute.

Based on the above, the researcher therefore suggests that further research should be conducted on the leadership styles of the managers in the company. Additionally, a study should be conducted on the willingness and negotiation power of the unionists in resolving conflict in the organisation.

## **5.6 Research recommendations**

Based on research analysis and findings, several recommendations for Automouldam workers are discussed below.

The research findings indicated that the most potential sources of conflict are mainly from intergroup and interpersonal conflicts. Therefore, it is recommended that both the managers and the workers should be able to respect and abide by the terms and conditions of the agreements they entered into. When any of the parties involved in the agreement breach the agreement they voluntarily entered into, mistrust and disharmony set in.

Secondly, poor communication between the management and the workers was also identified as a potential cause of conflict in the company. The researcher suggests that proper channels of communication should be established in the company. For instance, some participants mentioned the issue of one sided communication, where the managers only give directives to the junior workers. This top-bottom communication approach adopted in the company should

be reviewed and a more viable two way approach, that is, top-bottom and bottom-top approach, should be adopted.

Thirdly, the issues of poor remuneration and incentives were also mentioned as possible causes of industrial conflict. It is pertinent to recommend that the management should regularly increase workers' salaries. This will ultimately motivate the workers to put in their best for the progress of the company. Additionally, the management of the company should provide incentives for the workers. For instance, bursaries for the workers' children should be introduced. From all indications, this will act as a catalyst in motivating workers to put in their best for the company.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

This study has been an exciting journey. This study was undertaken with the intention of exploring ways in which the managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency at Automouldam (Pty) Ltd. Based on the objectives of the study, research questions were developed which were used as a guide in analysing the data. Relevant literature was used to explain the concept of conflict, types of conflict, among others. The general system theory as a theoretical framework was blended in the study to make sense of ways in which different components (departments) in the company interact. However, the malfunctioning of any of the component parts of the system (department) as a result of conflict renders it unproductive and this leads to the destruction of the entire organisation (system).

Qualitative and interpretive paradigms were used in the study. Based on the qualitative and interpretive approaches adopted, and in line with the thematic analysis used for the study, the researcher was able to reach the following findings: that a breach of contractual agreements, inadequate or poor communication between employer and employees, goal differences among workers, lack of cooperation among workers, increment of salary and other incentives, and inadequate resources, were the potential conflict areas in Automouldam (Pty) Ltd. On the other hand, low productivity, time wasting, absenteeism, disharmony, psychological trauma/stress and low income to the company have been identified as the effects of conflict in the company. In a related development, the establishment of a good working relationship with workers, provision of adequate channels of communication, provision of a good working environment and provision of incentives have been identified as

the possible ways in which managers develop conflict management strategies for the optimisation of organisational efficiency in the company.

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## **Appendix 1**

## **Appendix 2**

Graduate School of Business and Leadership

University of KwaZulu-Natal,

Westville Campus

Dear Respondent

### **Interview schedule for principal managers**

**Topic: Developing conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in Automouldam Company Limited.**

1. Please can you tell me how long you have been working in this company.
2. As a manager in the company, can you explain the nature of conflict the company has been experiencing in recent times.
3. Can you explain the causes of this conflict in this company.
4. As a manager in this company, can you tell me the level of welfare package(s) you have put in place for your workers.
5. Narrate to me the degree and channel of information dissemination in your company.
6. As the manager of this company, what type of managerial style do you adopt?
7. Tell me the level of your consultations in decision making with your junior workers.
8. Please explain how frequently you consult with other managers in decision making in the company.
9. Explain the conflict management strategies you adopt in resolving conflict in the company.

Thanks so much for your participation.

Louis Akpan

### **Appendix 3**

Graduate School of Business and Leadership

University of KwaZulu-Natal,

Westville Campus

Dear Respondent

#### **Interview schedule for factory workers**

**Topic: Developing conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in Automouldam Company Limited.**

1. Please can you tell me how long you have been working in this company.
2. As a worker in the company, can you explain the nature of conflict the company has been experiencing in recent times.
3. Can you explain the causes of this conflict in this company.
4. As a worker in this company, can you tell me the level of welfare package(s) the management has put in place for the workers.
5. As a worker, explain to me the degree and channel of information dissemination the manager adopted in the company.
6. In your opinion, tell me what type of managerial style the manager(s) adopt in the company.
7. Explain the level of consultation your manager adopts in decision making.
8. In your opinion, explain the conflict management strategies your manager adopts in resolving conflict in the company.
9. In your view, which conflict management strategy(s) do you expect your manager to adopt in resolving conflict in the company?

Thanks.

Louis Okon Akpan

## **Appendix 4**

Graduate School of Business and Leadership

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Westville

3<sup>rd</sup> May, 2016

Managing Director,

Automouldam Limited,

Durban

Dear Sir

### **Permission to conduct research in Automouldam Limited**

I am Louis Okon Akpan, an M.Com student in the Graduate School of Business and Leadership at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. You are invited to participate in a research project entitled: Developing conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in Automouldam Company Limited.

The aim of this study is to investigate ways in which the managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in Automouldam.

Through your participation, I hope to understand the causes of conflict and ways in which managers develop conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency of the company. However, the results of this study are intended to contribute to the reduction, if not complete eradication, of the conflict in your company.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Therefore, you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time with no negative consequence. Furthermore, there will be no monetary gain from participating in this research study. Confidentiality and anonymity of records identifying you as a participant will be maintained by the Graduate School of Business and Leadership, UKZN.

If you have any questions or concerns about participating in this study, please contact me or my supervisor at the numbers listed above.

It should take you about one hour to respond to the structured interview. I sincerely hope you will make yourself available for the interview. The attached are the interview schedules (see Appendix 2 & 3) for the study.

Yours sincerely

Louis Okon Akpan

Investigator's signature\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 5

## **Appendix 6**

Graduate School of of Business and Leadership

University Of KwaZulu-Natal

Westville Campus

**M. Com. Research Project: Developing conflict management strategies for optimal organisational efficiency in Automouldam Company Limited.**

**Researcher:** Louis Okon Akpan

**Supervisor:** Dr A. Kader

### **INFORMED CONSENT**

I \_\_\_\_\_ (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project. I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_

Date